No. 670 DEC. 11, 1909 5 CENTS

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

BEHIND THE MASK

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 *per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by* STREET & SMITH, 79-89 *Seventh Ave., N. Y.*
Copyright, 1909, by STREET & SMITH.
No. 676. NEW YORK, December 11, 1909. Price Five Cents.

BEHIND THE MASK

OR,

Nick Carter and the Queen of the Mardi Gras.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE MASQUE OF THE BOHEMIANS.

Nick Carter sat upon a balcony on one of the quieter and nicer residential streets of old New Orleans, and the hour was early evening.

The street was "quieter" only by comparison, however, for there was a confusion of noise all over the city—the blowing of horns, ringing of bells, singing, music, and the glad sound of voices; for it was the time of the Mardi Gras, and one could scarcely find a grouch in the whole town with a search warrant!

This street, on which Nick Carter looked down, and along its walks and roadway, was already brightening with innumerable lamps, although it was only early evening.

It was a street which most of the parades, or "masks," included in their line of march, and a sudden burst of louder music in the distance announced the approach of another procession.

Nick crossed his legs and leaned back, pulling comfortably on a good cigar that he had brought in himself from Havana two days before. He was resting after a long and arduous case which had taken him to the South American republic of Honduria, and subsequently into some of the strangest adventures of his entire career.

Chickering had cabled him before he left La Guayra on the *Carlotta* steamship (which had touched at Havana, too) that there were matters needing his immediate attention in New York. But Nick had somehow got a little of the "mañana" feeling of the Spanish-American countries in his bones, and he lazily lingered in New Orleans after landing.

There was a reason other than disinclination to get back to work, too. Nick had in his care a young and very beautiful woman, Mademoiselle Cecile Dubois, the heiress of Señor Manuel Alvarez, one-time president and dictator of the Republic of Honduria, and the fortune the detective had been the means of recovering for her mounted well into the millions.

Both the girl and her money were in Nick's care, and the young lady herself had expressed a strong wish to remain in New Orleans for a glimpse of the Mardi Gras.

Her mother had lived here most of her life, had come of a very old Creole family, though at one time she had also been a noted dancer upon the stage. Miss Dubois had a host of friends in New Orleans.

She was now staying in this fine old mansion, over the porte-cochère of which Nick Carter sat, with the Matthieus, and, although the detective had rooms at a hotel, he was at the house, with a watchful eye over Cecile Dubois, most of the time.

As the sound of the marching band and its attendant company grew louder, Miss Dubois stepped out upon the porch through the long window and stood beside Nick's chair.

"This is the Society of Bohemians—we must surely see this," she said to the detective gayly.

She was a lissome, dark girl, with a wealth of shining black hair, and eyes that attracted attention wher-

ever she went. Nick had known her mother many years before—Lucile Moritz, or Morris, the professional dancer.

Her mother's strange death in the mountains of Honduria twelve years before had cast a mantle of sadness and seriousness over Cecile Dubois' naturally joyous nature. At that time Señor Manuel Alvarez had come to the child's rescue and had promised the dying mother to defend and befriend Cecile.

He had done this, and in gratitude Cecile was now pledged to the "Great Cause," as she called it—the ultimate freedom of Honduria from the despotic control of the present dictator, General D'Conyer.

One of D'Conyer's underlings, a certain Colonel Reiffe, assisted by a sailor named Mondrego, had murdered Alvarez in New York. But, in dying, the old man had left Cecile his great fortune, and the task of helping his native country.

Gratitude alone would have made Cecile Dubois comply with the wishes of the dead dictator; but there was a deterrent influence at work, and Nick hoped that this influence would be sufficient to put Cecile Dubois in a more sane and sensible mood about the whole business.

He did not believe that there was any hope of overthrowing D'Conyer, and it would be a waste of good money to try and do such a thing. Besides, who would lead the insurgents against the established government of that troubled republic?

The detective looked up at Cecile now, and asked:

"Where's the doc, Miss Cecile? Why isn't he on hand to see the procession, too?"

She made a little face at him, but smiled.

"Do be good, Mr. Carter. Don't throw that tiresome doctor at my head all the time. He really is becoming a nuisance!"

"Fie, Miss Dubois!" cried Nick. "And Doctor Monteith is a nice fellow, too."

"Don't bother me about him," she said, tossing her head. "Let us look at the maskers. Here comes the band. This society is an old one, Mr. Carter. Poor Lucile Moritz used to belong to it."

She always spoke of her mother in that way, although there was no disrespect in her tone.

"Its members are, for the most part, artists, writers, newspaper people, actors, and singers. And they must be light-hearted to keep in good standing in the club. Poor Lucile Moritz was always light-hearted until she learned that my father was such a wicked man."

She sighed; but in a moment the smile broke out upon her face again. The head of the procession came in sight. Cecile took a seat beside the detective, and they both leaned upon the balcony railing to watch the antics of the maskers.

The Mardi Gras of New Orleans is distinctly different from any other celebration. It was originated by the light-hearted French Creoles of the city, and other cities and towns that have imitated it make of the celebration either an orgie of rowdyism or a commercial enterprise.

The people watching this procession from the balconies of the houses showered confetti down upon the brilliantly dressed actors in the street drama, and it was true that there was a great blare of trumpets and horns that almost drowned out the band at times.

Men and women alike were masked and dressed in parti-colored clown's suits. There was a float representing the globe, drawn by four decorated horses, and on top of this globe a woman danced.

That she was a professional terpsichorean artist there could be no doubt, for she balanced herself and pirouetted on the apex of the globe as lightly as a leaf.

She was dressed like the others in a parti-colored suit, with full knee breeches, her lower limbs incased in light-blue hose, with slippers to match. She possessed a charming figure, every turn and poise of which was pure grace.

The little spotted, pointed cap set atop her dark curls lent a piquancy to her attitude, and the mask she wore tantalized the onlooker into wishing he might see the whole of her countenance, the dimpled chin and rosy lips of which augured a delightful continuity of expression.

She really was the *Spirit of Bohemia*, and her dance was an expression of the lightness and joy that is supposed to be the usual mood of all good Bohemians toward the world, whether the sun shines or no!

Cecile Dubois laid her hand upon Nick Carter's arm suddenly, and whispered:

"Do you know, as a little girl, I remember poor Lucile Moritz dancing the *Spirit of Bohemia* in such another Mardi Gras as this?"

"Indeed?"

"Yes. I remember the occasion clearly. I was taken by some friend to see the procession pass and to see her dancing on the globe. See!" and there was growing excitement in the girl's voice, and her hand was stretched forth to indicate the light and airy figure on the float. "She looked just like that. She was much the same sort of a figure as that woman, Mr. Carter. You say you remember her; am I not right?"

"Perhaps you are," admitted Nick, gazing with increased interest upon the woman poising so gracefully on the globe.

"She—is—just—like," breathed Cecile, her nervous fingers tightening on the detective's sleeve.

Nick did not look around at her. He was interested enough himself to keep his eyes on the dancer atop of the globe.

The float came opposite the balcony. The din of horns, and laughter, and song would have drowned the voices of Nick and his companion had they tried to communicate with each other.

The girl's tight grasp remained upon her companion's arm. Nick felt this and realized its tension, without wholly understanding it.

The dancing woman turned toward them as the float passed. She looked up at the balcony; indeed, she was almost on a level with it. She gazed stead-

ily at the two—whether at Nick himself or at the girl, the detective could not tell.

And then she deliberately raised her hand and slipped the mask upward, so that, for a moment, her whole face was revealed.

It was a piquant countenance, the eyes dark and with fire in their depths; the nose rather large, betraying some Jewish blood; the forehead full, with eyebrows which almost met. And the single glance she shot at the balcony and its occupants was electrifying.

Nick started himself. But he realized at the same instant that the fingers of Cecile Dubois had relaxed upon his arm. He turned swiftly to look at her.

The girl had fallen back in her chair. Her head hung loosely from her neck and her eyes were closed, while every particle of color had gone from her face.

She had fainted.

Nick Carter looked back at the float, even as he rose to call somebody to assist the girl. The dancing woman was again pirouetting on the globe in the midst of the shouting, joyous throng.

CHAPTER II.

A RETROSPECT.

Late that night Nick Carter was sitting in his own room at the hotel, and with him was a most amusing companion. Captain Ironsides O'Brien, the old filibuster, had been Nick's comrade and assistant for some weeks now, and the detective aways found him enjoyable company.

Ironsides was a tall, well set-up man, as lithe as a panther, with a clean-shaven face, saving for his bristling, military mustache, a soldierly carriage, a breezy line of conversation always on tap, and he was minus one arm. As he termed it he was a "side-wheeler."

O'Brien was an old filibuster. He had been active at the beginning of the Spanish-American War, but he had earned his sobriquet long before that date.

For years there had not been a turmoil in any South American or Central American republic that O'Brien had not had his finger in. He had run many cargoes of arms and ammunition, being an excellent navigator, and knowing the tropical coasts of America—Atlantic, Pacific, or Gulf—as well as he knew the streets of Brooklyn, his native heath!

When Nick had decided to remain a while in New Orleans, O'Brien had promptly decided to do the same. He was in the hotel when Nick had returned, and had come into the detective's room for a nightcap smoke before retiring.

The Irishman's pipe was well alight and Nick's cigar was aglow, when the former remarked:

"What's come over the doc, I dunno, Carter?"

"Doctor Monteith?"

"Yep."

"Is he in?"

"Sure; I stuck me head in the door of his room just now and asked him to come and smoke, and he snapped like a trout at a bluebottle fly. I shut the door quick to save me head from his bootjack."

"I guess it was not as bad as that," said Nick, smiling.

"'Tis that female girl, I suppose," said O'Brien with a sigh. "And such a decent feller as the bye was, too."

"You think his being a lover spoils him?"

"It spiles any man," declared the philosophical O'Brien. "I come of a nation that's always fightin' an' makin' love. But if we'd stuck to fightin' an' done less love-makin' ould Ireland would have been free long ago."

Nick blew a cloud of smoke thoughtfully from his lips, and said:

"I suppose there is trouble between Monteith and Miss Dubois, and he may feel down-hearted."

"A lover's quarrel—pah!"

"It's more than that. It is serious. The young man was near winning her to his way of thinking, and I believe there would have been a wedding when we got back to New York, was it not for something that happened this evening."

"Pshaw!" said the kind-hearted O'Brien. "What's gone wrong? As long as the doc wants her so bad, I'd not put a deeficulty in his way."

"But fate has."

"What's the obstacle?"

"Listen here, O'Brien," said Nick seriously. "You are pretty well versed in this whole matter that brought us down here. You know much that I know about Cecile Dubois and the great fortune given her by old Alvarez."

"Sure, I know enough about it," admitted O'Brien. "And I was pretty certain at one time that we'd never git it all."

"And how about keeping it?" queried Nick pointedly.

"Eh?" ejaculated the other. "You don't think there's any likelihood of our having to fight for it again?"

"Put yourself in the place of General D'Conyer and his party. They know that, with the pirate's hoard, Alvarez's fortune mounted into millions of American money. Would you, being that D'Conyer, willingly or easily give up hope of obtaining the money, or a part of it, after all?"

"I certainly would want it," admitted O'Brien.

"Well!"

"What are you getting at, Carter?" demanded the filibuster. "Do you mean that our friend, the boss of Honduria, is reaching out yet for those scads?"

Nick laughed shortly. "He has a long arm, they told us in La Guayra—and they hate him there. His arm reached to New York and killed Alvarez. You remember that I told you how I, by chance, happened to be passing the apartment house on East Fourteenth Street where Alvarez and Miss Dubois lived when the old Spaniard was killed.

"His murder was accomplished by the bite of a poisonous asp, or adder, brought from the mountains of Honduria. This adder is fond of milk. Alvarez was in the habit of taking a glass of milk before retiring at night, and sometimes through the night, as well.

"A glass bottle of milk was set in an open box on the fire escape, the weather being very mild for winter. Reiffe and Mondrego fished that bottle up and substituted another bottle, with a punctured pasteboard cap, in its place, working from the roof directly over the windows of the Alvarez apartment.

"Then the adder was dropped into the box, and when Alvarez reached for the bottle the snake bit him. Dr. Monteith, who had already been known to Miss Dubois, and had fallen in love with her, was called, but he could not save the ex-dictator of Honduria. He was due to die.

"I," continued Nick reflectively, "was with him at the last. I heard him declare Miss Dubois his sole heir; but the fortune was given to her for a specific purpose.

"Old Alvarez was really a patriot. He had saved his money for a distinct purpose after being exiled from his country.

"He believed that the salvation of Honduria was to be accomplished some day by peaceful means. He hoped that some good man would arise to lead his people out of the bondage of D'Conyer's oppressive government. And the millions he had managed to amass were to be used eventually to finance such a new régime in Honduria."

"But the money had to be found first," grunted O'Brien, puffing slowly on his pipe.

"True. Alvarez put that work in my hands. He had never touched a dollar of his great fortune after being exiled."

"And good reason for it. He could not get at it," said O'Brien.

"That's neither here nor there. He gave me the clue to the secret hoard. He told me to find his good friend and follower, Pedro Salazar, once commander of the *Señora Valdez,* and ask him for a certain sealed packet that Alvarez placed in Pedro's hand at the time he escaped from his enemies at Santa Luca, the main seaport of Honduria.

"You know, O'Brien, how we found Pedro Salazar. His old ship had been stranded on the wild coast of Honduria while trying to run in a cargo of arms and ammunition for the insurgents when an abortive attempt to restore Alvarez to power was made by his friends five years, or more, ago.

"The hulk of the old ship was as sound as ever, one mast was standing, and she had become overgrown with the tropical jungle where she sat, squatting, in the dry estuary.

"We found Pedro—or, rather, you found him, O'Brien—and the sealed packet explained that the treasure was hidden in a secret room in the bows of the *Señora Valdez;* but Reiffe and his friends became aware of our discovery, too, and they beat us to the stranded ship.

"Indeed, Reiffe and Mondrego obtained the part of the treasure called the 'pirate's hoard,' and hid it from us. We secured, however, Alvarez's private fortune for Miss Dubois, and started in the *A. B. Fenelon* for La Guayra with the money, and with Colonel Reiffe as our prisoner, after Mondrego was killed by Pedro, but leaving Pedro behind in the jungle.

"In the hurricane that followed, the *Fenelon* passed the *Carlotta,* mail steamer from New Orleans, bound, as we were, for La Guayra. A woman fell overboard from the *Carlotta,* and a stoker jumped after her, and both were rescued and brought aboard the *Fenelon.* The rescued woman proved to be Miss Dubois herself; the stoker was Doctor Monteith, who had followed her incognito from New York.

"His prompt saving of Miss Dubois certainly helped his cause with her—no doubt of that. When we left La Guayra, I really believed that she would be ready to marry him on her arrival in New York," said Nick thoughtfully.

"Huh! How you going to tell what a woman wants, or what she means to do?" demanded the pessimistic O'Brien. "Look at the yeoman's service the doc rendered when we were after poor old Pedro and the *Señora Valdez.*"

"That's right. And it brings us to the remainder of our strange adventures in tropical waters, O'Brien," said Nick quickly.

The one-armed man grinned reflectively. "That was going some—eh?" he observed.

"When the *Carlotta* came crippled into La Guayra, and reported passing a floating wreck that looked like a forest, colliding with her sufficiently to rattle out of her upper works silver pieces of ancient Spanish money, known in the piratical days of the Spanish Main as 'pieces of eight,' it certainly gave us food for reflection," said Nick.

"We both believed that it was the *Señora Valdez,* carried to sea again when the waters rose in the tropical downpour and hurricane, and we believed that Pedro Salazar was aboard of her, and that in some mysterious way the pirate's hoard was with him.

"Reiffe heard of the mysterious floating wreck, and he escaped from jail and went in search of it, too. It was a race between us for the derelict, and, although Reiffe got to her first, we won out by a series of unexpected incidents, O'Brien."

"We won out by your sheer nerve, Carter!" declared the filibuster, admiringly.

"However, Reiffe and the dead and gone Mondrego had hidden the pirate's hoard in the crow's nest of the old wreck, and in her upper rigging of thick vines, where we would never have thought of looking for it.

"We got the vessel, and Pedro sold her at La Guayra, and the whole fortune is practically in Miss Dubois' possession. I really thought," added Nick, with emphasis, "that the case was closed, and that

Miss Dubois would reward Doctor Monteith for his heroism by marrying him."

"But something has put the kibosh on that last arrangement, eh?" queried the one-armed adventurer carelessly.

"It is more than that. It is not a mere tiff between the doctor and our beautiful young lady."

"What, then?" asked O'Brien.

Nick removed the cigar from his mouth, looked at his companion steadily for a moment, and then said:

"Let me tell you what happened over to the Matthieus' house this evening, and then tell me what, in your judgment, it means."

CHAPTER III.

O'BRIEN AS "SIR GALAHAD."

While O'Brien fired up his dhudeen again, Nick related briefly the incident that had occurred just as the procession of the Society of Bohemians passed the balcony, where he, Carter, and Cecile Dubois had sat.

"I was at first mystified by the strange emotion displayed by the girl," said Nick. "It puzzled me vastly."

"D'ye really think the look the dame on the float gave her was what made the girl faint?" asked the slangy O'Brien.

"Not the look, nor the fact that she looked up at us; but it was the face of the dancer herself."

"Heh?"

"It puzzled me. I knew that the face seemed somewhat familiar to me. But at first, while the women were running, and until we knew that there was nothing worse the matter with Miss Dubois than that she had fainted, I could not think clearly of the dancer's countenance. But when I came to go over the matter carefully, I quickly arrived at a certain conclusion that explains one part of the mystery."

"The mystery of Miss Dubois' fainting?"

"Of her emotion on seeing the face of the dancer—yes. And it was this:

"This Queen of the Mardi Gras is the exact image of Lucile Moritz!"

"Miss Dubois' mother!" exclaimed O'Brien.

"Yes."

"It couldn't be——"

"Lucile Moritz is surely dead," declared Nick firmly.

"That's so, I guess. But, Holy Ike! what kind of a game is this, then? You mean, of course, that the woman looks like Lucile as she looked years ago?"

"Yes. As I remembered her. And evidently as Miss Dubois remembered her."

"And Miss Dubois remembered seeing her mother dance this *Spirit of Bohemia*, too?"

"So she says."

"By Jove, Carter, it looks like a trick!"

"That is what I wanted an expression of your opinion on," said Nick quietly.

"And you've got it!"

"But what's at the bottom of the trick?" asked the detective, eying O'Brien sharply.

"Oh, ah—— Well, that is not so easy to say."

"No?"

"The woman evidently knew the girl," blurted out O'Brien, rubbing his head.

"I believe she deliberately showed her face so that Miss Dubois would see the resemblance."

"It looks like that," said O'Brien weakly.

"And is that all you can say?"

"See, here, we haven't been in New Orleans but two days or so," declared the adventurer. "We weren't sure ourselves of staying here, were we?"

"Correct. It is only a whim of Cecile's that has kept us."

"And these parades and things were made up weeks ago. This Society of Bohemians, to which Lucile Moritz once belonged, had doubtless picked the woman to dance the *Spirit of Bohemia* weeks ago."

"You are right," admitted Nick.

"How about the element of chance entering into this thing, then?"

"It would seem that it did. Yet I have serious doubts about it. The woman plainly knew Cecile. She deliberately showed her face to her. She was not startled on seeing Cecile, that is sure. She expected to see her right there on the balcony, and it was prearranged—at least, she had decided in her own mind—to attract Cecile's attention, and show to the girl her face."

"Huh!" grunted O'Brien.

"But the meaning of it! The significance of it! That's the puzzle."

"You got me guessing—as sure as you're born, you have," declared the one-armed man.

"Well, let's waive that for the time being," said Nick. "She did it for some purpose. When we find out who the woman is, we may learn her reason for deliberately lifting her mask and showing her face to Cecile.

"But let me tell you now, O'Brien, of the result, or effect, it had upon the girl herself."

"Upon Miss Dubois?"

"Yes."

"She just fainted, didn't she?"

"She did. We had a terrible time bringing her around, too. Those highly strung, nervous temperaments are hard to manage when once they loose all holds. It was two hours later, and Doctor Monteith had returned to the house and had helped us, before Cecile opened her eyes."

"What then?" asked O'Brien, smoking fast.

"Well, the girl's eyes rested on Monteith when she came to herself. A spasm of pain crossed her face. She stretched out her hand and put it against his breast as though to ward him off from her, and she said one word—and she meant it!"

"What's that?"

"No!"

"Huh! The poor guy! Like a woman, ain't it? Blamed it all on him because she fainted?"

"I guess not," said Nick.

"What did she mean, then? Threw him down, then and there, didn't she?"

"Perhaps."

"Then——"

"I tell you what she had in her mind. She would not say very much to any of us. The poor doc went out pretty soon, and I could see he was cut up badly. I tried to get out of her what the trouble was," said Nick, "and this is what she told me:

"She believed what she had seen was a warning. 'Warning about what?' I asked. 'I believe I saw my mother's face,' said Cecile.

"I tried to laugh the matter off. 'So did I see her,' I said. 'That woman looked like her, I admit.'

"'Then you saw it, too?' she cried, and seemed more convinced than before. I got it out of her finally," said the detective, "that she thought I had seen her mother's lineaments in the face of the masked dancer, because she, Cecile, had had hold of me at the moment.

"I don't know what brand of foolishness this is, but she explained it satisfactorily to herself. She even grew quite angry when I suggested that perhaps the queen of those Bohemians chanced to resemble her mother."

"Thunder!" ejaculated O'Brien, with disgust. "Can you beat 'em?"

"It is exasperating. And it troubles me, too."

"About the doc, you mean?"

"I admit I hate to see the fellow lose his chance of marrying her. It would be the best thing in the world for her if she married and settled down, too. Wifely duties and possible children would knock all the foolishness of that kind out of her pretty head," declared Nick, with disgust. "But the main trouble—the thing that I want to draw your attention to, O'Brien—is not there. It is in this:

"She does not believe that the woman dancing on the globe was her mother; of course not. Nor does she believe that the woman looks anything like her mother did.

"Her idea is that, for the moment, her mother appeared to her in the spirit, and in warning! That I saw it, too, because by chance there happened to be a physical connection between us two at the moment the masked woman looked up at us."

"And what was the warning for?" grunted O'Brien.

"She was warned against going farther on what she calls a path of selfishness. In other words, her mother's spirit recalled her to the duty of devoting her future life to carrying through the project of Manuel Alvarez.

"When Lucile Moritz lay dying back there in the mountains of Honduria, she exacted the promise from Alvarez that he would care for her daughter. On the other hand, Lucile warned the little Cecile that, providing Alvarez kept his oath, she, Cecile, would be cursed if ever she proved ungrateful to the dictator of Honduria.

"The strange happenings in the life of this girl have all made their impression on her. She believes that she will be cursed if she neglects Alvarez's Great Cause! and to marry Monteith and be happy, she considers, will be the height of ingratitude.

"With Cecile, as with a lot of other unfortunate people in this world, it is her belief that she cannot keep faith and be happy at the same time! You know, a whole lot of folk associate their religion with gloom.

"However, she's got it fixed in her mind that to love and marry the doctor is treachery to the Great Cause. The appearance we saw to-night of the dancing woman has fixed that belief in the girl's mind. Now, O'Brien, do you know what I think?"

"I'm hanged if I do, Nick."

"I believe that there is some outside influence working upon this girl's mind that we know nothing about."

"What do you mean?"

"Look you," said Nick earnestly, "who is going to be benefited by her present attitude? What is going to become of the great fortune which is practically in her hands?"

"She's going to fool it away some day in a scheme to free Honduria."

"That is not the thing I fear. She is going to practically have the management of the vast sum without the help and advice of somebody whom she can love and trust; and designing persons are going to try and get the money from her, O'Brien."

"That's a safe bet, Nick."

"Who are those designing persons? Who already knows all about the treasure we found for her, and has already schemed to possess it?"

"I'm on! I'm on!" cried O'Brien. "D'Conyer is the man."

"D'Conyer is the man," repeated Nick.

"But about this fairy——"

"This queen of the Bohemians?"

"Yes."

"I tell you, O'Brien, that there must be something wrong there. I don't know who she is, of course. I must find out. And I must know what relation, if any, she bears to D'Conyer, or his hirelings.

"I am convinced that somebody, who knows Cecile Dubois' high strung and nervous nature, has originated a plot to work on the girl's mind which will deter her from marriage, thereby shutting her off from the guardianship of a man whom I know would honorably watch over her fortune and herself. I want to know who these people are. The woman who lent herself to this mask must be looked up. And, O'Brien!"

The one-armed man was tamping more tobacco into his pipe, which he did very neatly, despite the fact that he had one less hand than another man! He looked up calmly.

"Well, sir?"

"You're the man to do this for me," said Nick, with decision.

"Me?"

The word came out in a roar, and O'Brien's calmness forsook him completely.

"Yes. I want you to play the knight, old man. I know that you have the necessary acquaintances to introduce you into that Bohemian Society. I want you to meet the lady who danced—the Queen of the Mardi Gras. Find out who she is, who she knows—what she knows, indeed."

"Holy Ike, Nick!" groaned O'Brien. "I'm no lady's man."

"But you can be. You are a deucedly romantic-looking dog," said the detective, grinning; "and your reputation is on your side. These folk will welcome you with open arms."

"Huh! The women, too?"

"Perhaps. You old woman hater! Your peril be upon your own head! It would serve you right if you got entangled with some pretty female."

"By Jove! I thought you were my friend," cried O'Brien; but he made no further objection to doing what the detective wished.

Nick went into the details of his scheme, and when they parted for their respective beds an hour later, a campaign was mapped out for the next day which, Nick hoped, would yield some fruit in the line of explanation as to who and what the dancer on the globe—the Queen of the Mardi Gras—was, and what connection she had, if any, with General D'Conyer, present president and dictator of Honduria.

CHAPTER IV.

MADEMOISELLE JOOST.

As Nick Carter had declared, Ironsides O'Brien had the entrance to the very society whose mask had brought about the incident which so puzzled and troubled the detective.

O'Brien had a broad acquaintance in almost every seaport city, and New Orleans was not an exception. The next morning, and before noon, he had renewed his acquaintance with three or four members of the Society of Bohemians.

They hailed O'Brien with joy. They were in the midst of their annual carousal, or celebration. Nothing would do but he must join them. One man found him a suit for the mask that evening, he was promised a pretty partner at the ball which was to follow, and, if he had accepted half the invitations he had to drink wine, he would have been no good for Nick Carter's purpose long before evening arrived!

To the man who had promised him a pretty partner, O'Brien said, with some seriousness:

"There's just one lady ye can introjuce me to, Michael. 'Tis The O'Brien that's lost his heart intirely to a nymph in the rabble I saw passin' through the strates last night."

"What do you mean?" asked his friend.

"In your procession she was. Ah, but she's the howlin' beauty."

"Ho, ho!" laughed his friend. "Has O'Brien—Old Ironsides!—come to it at last? The woman hater has met his match, I declare!"

"Sure, she would turn the head of an anchorite," raved O'Brien, trying to throw into his speech sufficient enthusiasm to impress his friend with the reality of his sudden passion.

"And which one of the ladies was it, old man?" queried the other sympathetically. "Heaven send she's not married and in love with her husband!"

"If she is, I'll call the spalpane out and do away with him!" declared O'Brien, with shocking boldness. "Michael, you are keeping me on tenterhooks, so ye are. I'll tell you who the lady is."

"Who, then?"

"She was danced the *Spirit of Bohemia*."

"Wow!" crowed his friend. "And is it so? Has the charming Joost gained another scalp to hang in her wigwam? O'Brien! O'Brien! what an unlucky divil ye air!"

"Why so?" asked the adventurer.

"Ye've fixed on a woman that has no more use for men than the Sphinx of Agypt. Me poor friend! ye doomed to trouble as the sparks fly upward."

"Elucidate," said O'Brien, apparently unshaken by this threat.

"Mademoiselle Joost is a darling—there's no getting around that fact," said his friend thoughtfully. "She is sweet and good, but full of fun, and if a man will play with fire he must expect to be scorched a bit."

"And she is fire?" asked O'Brien.

"She has scorched the wings of many a foolish chap. They fall in love with her. She will flirt if they insist; or she will be friendly in a serious way, if they are nice boys. But in the four years she has been here in New Orleans she has never had a lover, and seems as far from marriage as a nun out of the convent yonder!"

"She is a man hater, then? I'm somethin' of a woman hater meself," grunted O'Brien. "Mebbe we'll get along better than you think."

"I warn you, old man!" cried his friend seriously.

"Against what? Learnin' to know a pretty woman? Pshaw! Tell me about her," urged O'Brien.

"Mademoiselle Joost dances at the Follies Theatre. She is really a nice little thing. My wife says she is as domestic as a house cat. But she does not believe in the protestations of mankind, O'Brien."

"Shure, she nades persuasion, then!" cried Ironsides.

"And it's you who have kissed the blarney stone, eh?" chuckled his friend. "Old man, you're due for a disappointment—and you'll likely take it hard."

"'Faint heart ne'er won fair lady,'" quoted O'Brien. "Go on, Michael. Tell me more."

"Faith, ye are hard hit. Would I ever have believed it?" cried his compatriot. "Well! The Joost took the public by storm four years ago——"

"She is from Paris?"

"Not so. From Copenhagen. She's a Dane, but I fancy she had a French mother. She is really a beautiful girl, and of a fine figure."

"She is all grace!" murmured O'Brien, blowing a windy sigh.

"Well, she pleased the public, and she continues to please them. Many a wealthy man has made love to her—or tried to. She keeps herself from all entanglements, although she is a 'good fellow,' and really beloved by all. She is the friend of both women and men alike. She really is charming."

O'Brien tried to show in his face that smirk of pleased emotion that would be natural to the lover hearing the object of his adoration praised.

"Oh, thunder!" gasped his friend. "I never thought it of you, O'Brien."

"Will you introjuce me?" asked the adventurer.

"If you really insist."

"I do."

"Come on, then. If I am to lead another lamb to the slaughter, it would better be over with at once. Mademoiselle Joost receives this afternoon. We are a bit early, but hours do not count for much in Bohemia."

"What do you know about her family?" queried O'Brien, as they walked to the lady's apartments.

"Now you are trying to get at her past. You would better let that alone," warned his friend. "Not that anybody knows aught to the Joost's detriment; but she seldom speaks about her former life. My wife believes that she ran away from Copenhagen, not from any person or persons there. The whole city must have loved her as we do here."

"She is a character, by Jove!" exclaimed O'Brien.

"She is a lovely bit of womanhood; and you are destined to endure an aching heart," returned the other warningly.

O'Brien shrugged his shoulders and threw back his head. "You'd be disappointed if I was the exception, Michael, eh?"

His friend looked him over slowly, and then said:

"You're something of a man, O'Brien. Many a woman has been in love with you, I warrant, whether you cared for them or not. It might be that the pretty Joost will lose her heart to you. Let me warn you. There are a dozen men in New Orleans that have offered her their hands and fortune; she would have none of them.

"But there is scarcely one of the rejected candidates who would not call out the man who played with Mademoiselle Joost, and jilted her, and do their prettiest to run him through the spot in his anatomy where his heart ought to be!"

"Well!" murmured O'Brien, "you certainly interest me, Michael."

CHAPTER V.

THE RIVALS.

There is usually a shocking lack of good taste in the selection and adornment of so-called "Bohemian quarters"; but perhaps the pretty Joost, as O'Brien's friend called the dancer, was not strictly a Bohemian.

Her rooms were quiet in tone, but well furnished and comfortable in the extreme. The long parlor, or "salon," was one of those rooms that attract one at first glance. There were a dozen groups of chairs, divans, and couches, which invited visitors to become intimate, and bred sociability.

There could positively be no "wall flowers" at mademoiselle's receptions. There was no room for such awkward furniture!

Now, when O'Brien and his sponsor entered, there was already the huge punch bowl set in the middle of the apartment. There were, as yet, few people here—less than a dozen. They were in two laughing, chattering groups.

O'Brien saw no hostess. At least, there was nobody who filled his idea of Mademoiselle Joost to welcome newcomers. It seemed like a free-and-easy resort, and three or four people hailed Michael as though they had as good a right to welcome visitors as the lady herself!

Somebody recognized O'Brien, too, and the adventurer found himself, in a few moments, the centre of a quickly formed group of new and old acquaintances, being put to the test of entertaining instead of being entertained.

Suddenly he felt the tap of a fan upon his arm. He turned to see what lady he had already met wished to attract his attention. And he knew that he looked at Mademoiselle Joost for the first time.

She was small, not plump, but a woman of curves, nevertheless. Her delicate frame was well covered with the firm flesh of a healthy, athletic woman. She was, indeed, a beauty.

And there was a lot in her face that O'Brien did not at first understand. He had accepted the enthusiastic praises of this little woman from the lips of his friend as being overcolored. But O'Brien's first thought when he gazed into her wide, brown eyes was not that she was merely beautiful. There was an impress of goodness on her serene countenance, too.

But when he spoke, and bowed over the soft little hand she offered him, the hardened old adventurer was stung in his deepest consciousness that she was really the daintiest, prettiest creature that he had ever met!

"You are Mist' O'Brien," she said, in the delicate flattery of broken English. "I haf hear of you. You are a soldier and a br-r-rave man. I shall like you."

There was the frankness of a child in her speech; but it was not a frankness that suggested boldness. She was altogether charming, and O'Brien yielded himslf unconditionally to the pleasure of her society.

O'Brien could usually be drawn out best by men. He was distinctly a man's man. But in ten minutes

he was in a retired corner by the side of the pretty, doll-like dancer, and she listened to his tales of adventure as *Desdemona* listened to *Othello*.

He came near forgetting the part he was to play, too. Instead of his getting information out of this woman who had danced the *Spirit of Bohemia*, she was learning a whole lot about Ironsides O'Brien that that rough-and-ready soldier of fortune had never told before—and never expected to tell to a woman!

Nick Carter would certainly have been amused had he seen his friend in this guise. He might have been somewhat alarmed, too, that O'Brien might fail in the work the detective had left in his hands.

But, while the Irishman was warming more and more toward the pretty dancer, there came a sudden interruption. Other people had arrived, sometimes singly, sometimes by twos and threes.

Everybody made himself, or herself, at home, with no regard to the mistress or the apartments. Sometimes they came and spoke to Mademoiselle Joost, and were introduced to O'Brien; but she did not consider that hospitality called upon her to stand at the door to welcome them as they entered. There was a distinctly friendly atmosphere without a particle of formality at Mademoiselle Joost's reception.

The interruption came upon the entrance of a man who, having bowed to several, saw the hostess sitting with O'Brien, and came directly across the room and stood before them. His shadow made the interested couple look up.

"Ah! Lieutenant Pizzarri! I am delighted to welcome you," said the little dancer, in perfect Spanish, although she had been speaking French to O'Brien the moment before.

The filibuster had looked up carelessly. But in the first glimpse he had of the man he was startled into tense interest.

The lieutenant was a lean, well-set-up young man, and, although he wore no uniform, O'Brien was quite confident to which branch of the service he belonged. He was not a soldier, and he was not an American even by adoption.

He had a keen, dark face, with a glossy black mustache, the ends of which were waxed and stood out stiffly—indeed, aggressively, like a tomcat's—from either side of his mouth. Otherwise he was not a bad-looking young man.

His little black eyes were beads—sparkling beads—as he looked down at the one-armed adventurer. The aggressive manner in which he stood, and the look he turned on the dancer's companion, showed her too plainly that he considered O'Brien in an unfriendly light.

Therefore, it was evident that Mademoiselle Joost hesitated to introduce the two men; and, upon Pizzarri's low bow in return for her courteous welcome, he went on chatting with him, evidently to gain a moment's time and learn, if possible, the cause of the lieutenant's attitude toward O'Brien.

The latter, meanwhile, kept a perfectly emotionless face to the front, seemingly to politely ignore Pizzarri until he should be introduced.

"And your sister? She is with you?" asked mademoiselle, in her low, sweet voice.

"Therese has not accompanied me, mademoiselle," replied the lieutenant.

"Ah!" returned the little dancer, with a chime of silvery laughter. "She is not yet recovered from the fatigues of last night—so?"

Pizzarri bowed low again. He might have agreed, or disagreed, with his hostess. But his eyes were fixed intently and meaningly on O'Brien. The introduction could not well be delayed longer.

"Oh," said Mademoiselle Joost, turning a somewhat appealing glance on the Irishman, "let me take pleasure in making you known to Monsieur O'Brien. Monsieur O'Brien, my good friend, Señor Lieutenant Pizzarri, of the Hondurian navy, at present on furlough, and visiting his most charming sister, also my friend, Señorita Bella Pizzarri. You have not met her yet—no? But you shall, and you will be charmed!"

So the little creature rattled on, but watching narrowly first one man and then the other. O'Brien was really amused, for more reasons than one. But the lieutenant glowered down on the long Irishman, who did not put himself out to rise, and his fists were tightly clinched so that the nails showed white.

"I have already met the Señor O'Brien," he said hoarsely, "although I neglected at the time to learn his name."

"Oh!" cried the dancer, in surprise.

"Yes," said the filibuster lazily. "We have met."

"I did not expect to find the señor in polite society," hissed the lieutenant. "But now that I have——"

"You will restrain yourself in your greeting of me while we are in the presence of ladies," finished O'Brien, quite carelessly, yet with a decisiveness that brought Pizzarri suddenly to himself.

The fellow bowed and stepped aside. The little dancer, flushed and anxious, turned to O'Brien quickly.

"Monsieur, you have quarreled with the lieutenant."

"Not at all."

"But he is determined to quarrel with you?"

"That is as may be."

"I do not understand such things, monsieur. You are both my friends. You will grieve me much—both of you—if this quarrel continues, or any harm comes of it to either of you."

"Especially to the lieutenant," added O'Brien, with rather a nasty smile. He was actually feeling a pang of jealousy!

"His sister is my friend—a very dear friend," the dancer said simply.

"Alas, I have no sister!" said O'Brien, looking at her directly, with an expression in his eyes that caused Mademoiselle Joost to let her own glance fall.

"You certainly have somebody dear to you, monsieur. It would be foolish to bring sorrow to them because of a quarrel with a boy."

"There isn't a soul on earth that would give a hang whether The O'Brien meets his match and goes under or not!" declared the Irishman, with the true pathos of his nation.

"That cannot be true," she cried, raising her eyes slowly.

"By me faith——"

His declaration was stopped on his lips. He saw, for an instant, the tears swimming in her eyes; and the look behind them fired the old filibuster's emotions as the look of a woman never had before.

He rose hastily. He felt that he must have a time to think—to gain control of himself.

"You are not going, Monsieur O'Brien?" she said softly.

"I must, mademoiselle. But, with your permission, I will come again."

"And you will not quarrel with the lieutenant?"

"I will promptly run away from him if he seeks me," declared O'Brien, laughing, "if only for one thing."

"And that is——?"

"To live in the light of your eyes again, mademoiselle!" declared the modern knight, and, bowing to kiss her hand, he strode quickly from the apartments.

He did not see Pizzarri; but what he muttered behind his mustache as he reached the street was all of the lieutenant.

"Nick is right!" was O'Brien's secret declaration. "The woman is mixed up with D'Conyer and his friends. That black little skunk of a lieutenant is the little monkey in brass buttons from the *Donna Collona D'Conyer* that we bluffed so well when we captured the derelict, the *Señora Valdez,* with Pedro aboard. Lieutenant Pizzarri proves the connection of the lady who danced the *Spirit of Bohemia* with the Hondurian plotters who are after old Alvarez's treasure."

CHAPTER VI.

NICK LAYS A COUNTERMINE.

"It is a starting point. It is something tangible," declared Nick Carter, when he had listened to O'Brien's report. (And the filibuster did not tell him everything, at that! He was in no mood to be joked regarding Mademoiselle Joost.)

"That dirty little black-mustached puppy dog, Pizzarri, must have been sent in a hurry to New Orleans by D'Conyer," growled the Irishman.

"You certainly have taken a terrible dislike to the lieutenant," observed Nick, in some wonder.

"I don't like his looks."

"Humph!"

"I don't like his manners."

"Indeed!"

"I believe he would really pick a fuss with me if he dared," complained O'Brien, realizing that the detective was watching him keenly and was on the verge of discovering his secret.

"So-ho! you are, for once, not looking for fight?"

"I don't want to have to either shoot the puppy or cut him up into mince meat. He's got a sister. Perhaps she has the bad taste to love him. It would be too sad for her."

"Well! We'll see what sort of a spoke we can put in their wheel. Before there is any dueling in the offing, I reckon we can bring matters to a head. If Pizzarri is really engaged with this Joost person"—O'Brien winced, but Nick did not notice—"in a plot to trouble Cecile Dubois, I'm going to stop it instanter!

"I've handed Reiffe over to the United States authorities here. He is in the federal prison. The New York police wanted him, but, while I was waiting for them to send for him, something might occur again to aid in the slippery devil's escape.

"Reiffe is a cunning enemy. If he cannot aid in the plot against Cecile, I want to know who is at the head and front of it, and measure that person's ingenuity and power. It can't be the girl, of course?"

"Mademoiselle Joost?" cried O'Brien, with an emphasis that Nick did not understand at the time.

"Yes."

"I do not believe it. She—she must have been used by these people," declared O'Brien, turning his face away.

"Oh, she knew what she was about," returned Nick carelessly. "She doesn't, of course, look anything like Miss Dubois, by chance?"

"I should say not!"

"Or like her mother?"

"I never had the pleasure of seeing Miss Dubois' mother," grunted O'Brien.

"Well, there is enough similarity in their looks for Cecile to prove that she is Lucile Moritz's daughter," said Nick dryly.

"Mademoiselle Joost looks nothing like Miss Dubois," declared the other, with finality.

"Then she is a clever make-up artist," said Nick. "She has not been led into something that she did not understand. If Lieutenant Pizzarri and his sister are her friends, she is doubtless in the pay of D'Conyer, too. O'Brien, we have a cunning enemy to match wits with in D'Conyer alone. His arm is long, it is true! But I am sure there is somebody here in New Orleans who is engineering this business, and I expect this person to show his, or her, hand before long."

"And what am *I* to do?" grumbled the Irishman.

"Let us keep on the same line of inquiry. It has brought results so far."

"That means I am to go back to Mademoiselle Joost?"

"Why, you don't mind that, do you?" chuckled Nick, hitting nearer the truth than he suspected at the moment. "She is a charming young lady, I have no doubt."

"Well," said O'Brien non-committantly.

"Keep about her. Play the knight nicely, old man," said Nick wickedly. "It won't hurt you."

"Think not, heh?" grunted O'Brien, but as he went out of Nick's presence he was thinking to himself:

"I'm paying a big price for doing a friend a favor—by Jove, I am! That little Joost has got me going. And where will it all end? Humph!"

On his part, the detective believed that he had got hold of the end of a thread of clue that would lead him finally to the truth regarding the plot against Cecile Dubois' peace of mind.

The cunning mind that was planning and guiding the execution of the scheme destined to finally obtain from Cecile the great fortune left in her control by Manuel Alvarez might be as far away as Honduria.

D'Conyer had shown himself a master of intrigue when the death of Alvarez was compassed by so deadly an instrument as the poisonous asp. A gun might have missed fire, or only wounded; the sharpest blade might fail to strike deep enough. But there had been no salvation for the man bitten by the deadly asp.

Now, Nick well knew that Cecile's death was not contemplated. To kill the young woman would be merely to throw the money into the care of the courts, and it would be difficult for the Hondurian plotters to get any control of the vast treasure of Alvarez then.

What D'Conyer's henchmen were after was the mental, and perhaps the physical, control of Cecile Dubois. To kidnap her would not be their plan. That would not secure the money.

But she was a high-strung young woman, possessed with an idea that her life work set her apart from other women, and would deprive her of the joys and companionships so necessary to womankind.

The first effect of the initial act of the plotters—the so-called "appearance" of Cecile's mother as the dancer of the *Spirit of Bohemia*—was to make Cecile break with her lover.

Nothing could have suited the enemy better, and this Nick Carter realized. Doctor Monteith, although an impulsive and romantic fellow, was wholly devoted to Cecile. He was to be trusted to guard her against imposition and false friends. Now, aside from Nick himself, she had nobody to defend her.

The person doing D'Conyer's will here in New Orleans must be a trusted lieutenant of the wily dictator of Honduria. What Nick had seen of young Pizzarri, when the *Donna Collona D'Conyer* had tried to take possession of the wreck of the *Señora Valdez*, and what O'Brien said of the young Hondurian, did not lead Nick to consider Pizzarri the head and front of the conspiracy in New Orleans.

It was not likely to be his sister, Bella Pizzarri, nor any other woman—not even Mademoiselle Joost, who had played the sorry trick on Cecile Dubois.

"Of course," considered Nick, "I am being watched. Cecile cannot make a move without attracting the attention of the enemy. Like enough, even O'Brien is under surveillance—and he'll likely run up against that Pizzarri, anyway.

"Now, the thing to do is to find out who is doing the shadowing, and then to follow that shadow, or shadows, to the person who set them on our trail.

"I have a mind to play a trick on the conspirators. I will draw them like a badger out of his hole—by Jove, I will!" muttered the detective, when he had long ruminated upon the situation.

"These very Matthieus, who are so friendly toward Cecile in all appearance, may be her enemies, after all. I don't know anything about them, saving that they are an old Creole family, wealthy, and respected in the city. They may have affiliations with the dictator of Honduria, nevertheless.

"However, these people are plotting to separate Cecile from her lover. Monteith is as likely a boy as ever stepped in shoe leather. I'm going to use him if I can to balk the enemy—it will be a fine revenge at that!" and Nick laughed at the thought.

Cecile, he knew, met him with little friendliness now. She seemed to distrust him; but the detective, understanding her mood, did not appear to notice that he was not welcomed at the Matthieus'.

After O'Brien had left him on this evening, to take part in the festival of the Society of the Bohemians, Nick paid a visit to the mansion. Really, it seemed that the friends of Cecile rather wanted to keep him from her. But he stated upon his arrival that he had something of importance to say to the girl, and he showed no intention of departing until he had seen her.

"That Doctor Monteith has been here several times during the day, and she has refused to meet him. She keeps to her room," they told Nick.

"Who is with her?" asked the detective, without showing his anxiety.

"She is alone—unless her maid is with her."

"Umph!" grunted the detective. "Her maid, eh? A new one? She had no maid before."

"Why, she has to have a maid, of course. Every lady does," explained Madam Matthieu, who was a very fashionable lady indeed.

"Miss Cecile hired this maid herself, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes," replied the madam carelessly. "But we saw to it that she was quite a proper person. She is a negress, rather intelligent, and came well recommended from friends of ours in St. James' parish."

"I've got to see Cecile to-night," said Nick firmly. "I may be called to New York any hour now, and there are some matters that must be settled, if Cecile positively refuses to go on with me."

This statement of Nick's he was sure rather pleased the Matthieus, but the detective's composure was unruffled. He showed nothing of his real feelings in his attitude toward the Creoles.

Finally he was rather ungraciously invited to follow the servant upstairs to Cecile's apartments. When he entered, the change in Miss Dubois' manner and looks quite shocked the detective; but he said nothing.

There was a woman in the room whom Nick had never seen before. She was rather a well-dressed female for a lady's maid. She was a negress, it was true, but there was Indian blood in her veins, as well, Nick judged, from her ruddy complexion and her great coils of black, sleek hair.

She sat by, stooping over some sewing, and appeared to be the most modest and proper of maids; but Nick was confident that her ears were alert, and her manner proved to the astute detective that she was a person of keen intelligence, and a good deal above her present station, in education, at least.

She was of a commanding figure, and was perhaps nearly fifty years of age, but exceedingly well preserved. She added, in herself, another mystery to this most puzzling affair.

"Cecile," said Nick, sitting down beside the girl and speaking as familiarly as he had been doing for the past few days when their adventures had brought them so close together, "I am sorry to hear that you are still laboring under the shock of that incident of last evening."

"You find me quite well, Mr. Carter," she said wearily.

"But not at all yourself," he said.

"You are mistaken. I am quite myself. I am awake at last, sir."

She spoke with some emphasis—with not a little excitement. Nick looked pointedly at the maid.

"I see we are not alone," he observed.

"It does not matter about Kate," she said shortly.

"This—this Kate seems to be a new acquisition," said Nick, in a low voice. "Who is she?"

"Don't you see?" returned the girl, rather crossly. "She is my maid."

"You had no idea of getting a maid yesterday."

"But I could not call upon the services of Madam Matthieus' servants all the time. It would not be right."

"Before last evening, Cecile, you would have asked my advice about a maid," said Nick quietly.

"Really, Mr. Carter!" exclaimed the girl, with some haughtiness. "Don't you think you are going too far?"

"Not in friendliness."

"I suppose you are my friend," said she doubtfully.

"The best friend you have," declared Nick firmly.

She flushed and dropped her eyes before him. The negress kept on quietly sewing.

"There is something I wish to say to you that would be better said when we are alone," Nick remarked calmly.

"Oh, it does not matter about Kate."

"Would you receive Doctor Monteith with this woman here?"

"I would not receive Doctor Monteith at all." Her tone seemed suddenly hard and angry.

"And is no physician visiting you?"

"I am not ill. I do not need a physician."

"Are you sure?"

"You anger me, Mr. Carter!" cried Cecile Dubois. "I will not listen to you if you have come to talk of the doctor. I have dismissed him. I know my own mind at last. Indeed, I dare not have anything more to do with him!"

She rose as she spoke, drew her hand from Nick's clasp, and swiftly went out of the room into her own bedroom, thus closing the interview.

The negress still remained stooped above her sewing, and did not move. Nick approached the door by which he had entered, his head dropped thoughtfully, and with every appearance of ignoring the woman. But as he passed out he shot her a single keen glance.

The negress was smiling quietly as her needle flew.

"Now—I—wonder——?" quoth Nick; but he did not finish his sentence aloud.

He went out into the brilliantly lighted streets, where the pleasure-loving people were already crowding in mask, and with music and confetti, and there he wandered about, deep in the puzzle.

But on one thing he was determined. The enemy had first succeeded in separating Cecile from the man who loved her, Doctor Monteith. Nick was determined to use that very individual, the girl's faithful lover, in countermining the plots of her foes.

CHAPTER VII.

O'BRIEN MAKES PROGRESS.

There was a one-armed man dancing with the other maskers in the procession of the Bohemians that evening. O'Brien kept close behind the great globe on which Mademoiselle Joost pirouetted, and for more than one reason he kept his eyes pretty continually upon the graceful figure of the dancer at the Follies Theatre.

Hard hit as the old filibuster was, he had continually in mind the fact that he had promised Nick Carter to keep watch upon mademoiselle's movements.

In his secret soul O'Brien did not believe that the little dancer would willingly have injured Miss Dubois. Her make-up to look like Cecile Dubois' mother, and her raising her mask so that Cecile could see her, he believed to be something that the Pizzarris had tricked her into doing. She could not have understood its significance.

On his own part, aside from wishing to help the detective, he desired to have this matter explained. How had Mademoiselle Joost been led into aiding the conspirators—and blindly?

The procession on this evening passed through the very same streets as before. Of course, O'Brien had not seen it the night previous, but he knew where the Matthieus lived, and his watchfulness became keener as they approached the mansion.

Before the first maskers arived at the house, O'Brien saw Cecile Dubois emerge through the long window out upon the balcony where she had sat with Nick

to view the procession the previous evening. There was a female figure with her, and as the Irishman drew nearer he saw that this was a negress.

Cecile leaned eagerly over the railing as the globe on which mademoiselle danced came near. Her eyes were fastened only on the graceful, lightly poised form of the Queen of the Mardi Gras.

But Mademoiselle Joost did not seem to notice her on this night. She swayed to and fro, in time to the music, and paid absolutely no attention to the white-faced girl on the balcony.

At least, he was sure that mademoiselle did not raise her mask on this occasion. The float, with the huge globe upon it, rumbled past, and the dancers in the street followed in a merry rout. Looking back, O'Brien saw the negress lead Cecile into the house again.

He determined in his own mind that there really was a most peculiar thing about the affair—and a phase of it that Nick Carter had not emphasized. Mademoiselle had shown not the slightest interest in the Matthieus' house, or anybody there.

Now, if she had exhibited herself to the group on the balcony, the evening previous, in the guise of the dead and gone Lucile Moritz, she should have shown this evening some small interest in the same house and the same girl whom she had once so strangely affected.

Here was another puzzle, and it seemed to O'Brien that it was important. He wondered where Nick was, and if he had noted the passing of the globe and the dancer on this evening.

O'Brien's eyes were keen. They had been on Mademoiselle Joost all the time. She had seemed utterly unconscious of Cecile.

"There's a mystery here that even Nick has not observed," declared the Irishman to himself. "I'll get at it—I swear I will!—if I can get any time at all alone with the pretty crathur this night!"

And O'Brien, being as hard hit as he was, was not likely to let anybody else get ahead of him when it came to playing the gallant for Mademoiselle Joost.

He was in the forefront of the crowd of maskers when the hall was reached where the society held its ball on this evening. A ladder was placed against the globe to aid in the little lady's safe descent.

O'Brien was as handy and as strong with his one arm as most men were with their full complement of limbs. As he shouldered his way forward, he recognized, in spite of the costume and the mask, the young Honduran naval officer, Lieutenant Pizzarri.

Of course, Pizzarri knew O'Brien. His empty sleeve "gave him away."

The Honduran's demeanor was agressive, and he tried to stand in O'Brien's path as he came to the foot of the ladder. But few men had stood in the filibuster's way in life and successfully "carried it off"!

O'Brien deliberately shouldered Pizzarri aside and [illegible] of his footing. Pizzarri cursed him in Spanish, and would surely have laid hands upon him had not some of the other men, thinking the whole affair a joke, held the fiery young Hondurian back.

"Out of the way, earthlings!" cried O'Brien. "I am going above. Mademoiselle has promised to be my partner this evening, and I shall hold my vantage 'gainst all comers. I warn ye!"

He reached up as the little lady slid nimbly down from the top of the globe, caught her with his one hand, and seated her upon his shoulder with a firmness and security that pleased her. She held on, with one hand thrust into O'Brien's thick, curling hair, and waved the tiny silk flag she carried as he descended the ladder.

The Bohemians were a free and easy crowd, and Mrs. Grundy had no power over them. The impropriety of the attitude of the little dancer did not trouble any of them—least of all herself. She remained on O'Brien's shoulder, the procession formed behind them, and so the whole company marched into the hall.

The wise ones kept Pizzarri back until he had cooled down. The orchestra struck up, and in the grand march O'Brien and his pretty little friend led the throng again. Mademoiselle Joost had shown the Irishman distinct favor. He was wise enough to see, in spite of his own perturbed feelings, that he might obtain her confidence, to a degree, at least.

This fact did not trouble him at all. Indeed, he was so enamored of the pretty dancer that he craved just such familiarity with her. But to obtain information from her, and then to give that information to Nick Carter, was another matter!

He did not believe she had willingly lent herself to the imitation of Lucile Moritz. Such a piece of cruelty could not be of her lightsome, kindly nature. O'Brien puzzled over the thing continually.

But he was enjoying himself meanwhile. Mademoiselle was most kind to him. Although she danced with others, she returned to the one-armed man often. O'Brien was a perfectly balanced man on the dancing floor. Many one-armed people never secure their proper balance even in walking, for the loss of a limb gives one a serious "list" to starboard, or port, as the case may be.

But O'Brien was really a fine dancer. Mademoiselle floated with him through the numbers and expressed herself as delighted with her partner's dancing.

At supper time there was a general unmasking. Naturally, O'Brien was to be known at any time because of his empty sleeve, and mademoiselle was a marked figure, too.

While they sat in a retired corner, mademoiselle eating an ice and O'Brien watching her too intently to do anything but play with his own spoon, a dark young woman—rather pretty and with light hair, which con[illegible] strongly with her brown skin—came across the dancing floor to them.

She was quite as small as Mademoiselle Joost, but,

in O'Brien's eyes, at least, lacked the dancer's grace and poise. The latter greeted her cordially, and immediately turned and introduced her to the Irishman.

"Bella, my good friend, Monsieur O'Brien. You must know my dearest girl, monsieur—my dear Bella Pizzarri."

Interested, O'Brien rose and bowed over the hand of the Hondurian girl. She did not look at all like the lieutenant. Later he learned that they were only half brother and sister.

If Bella Pizzarri disliked the Irishman for her brother's sake, she did not show that dislike. She was most pleasant to him, and was as lively and entertaining as mademoiselle herself.

But if she had joined them for the express purpose of breaking up the new intimacy of O'Brien and mademoiselle for that evening, at least, she was mainly successful.

The Irishman would not yield what he had already secured, however. If Senorita Pizzarri wished to crowd him out, and introduce her own brother in his stead, she was not really successful. O'Brien stuck like a limpet to the rock, and the lieutenant did not make his appearance.

But it might have been that the Pizzarris feared the intimacy of the Irishman and mademoiselle. Of course, they must know that he would have some interest in Cecile Dubois, as he had been practically in her employ for some weeks. If the dancer of the Follies-Theatre had played the part of Cecile's dead mother, surely the Hondurians would fear her growing intimacy with O'Brien.

The Irishman bided his time, however, and at a moment's release from the watchfulness of she whom he had begun to mentally call "the Pizzarri Cat," he whispered in mademoiselle's ear:

"There is something I must say to you, mademoiselle! There is no privacy here. There is already a carriage engaged and waiting to take you home. May I ride with you and tell you what is in my heart?"

Mademoiselle Joost was serious in a moment. She looked with her big brown eyes deep into the steel eyes of the adventurer, and it was several seconds before her gaze fell. Then she whispered:

"Do you think it safe, Monsieur O'Brien? You know, flirtations of the ballroom——"

"This is not a flirtation," declared O'Brien firmly. "Whether you have any particular feeling for me or not, mademoiselle, at least we are friends. These hours that I have spent in your company will be memorable all my life—believe me!"

She wavered a moment, but finally said, with a roguish little side glance as her dear friend Bella returned to them:

"As the carriage must be of your engaging, I cannot keep you from riding in it, monsieur."

"You must go home with Carlos and I, dear. Poor Carlos! he is quite wildly jealous," declared Bella, shrugging her shoulders.

She had evidently suspected the moment's private conversation of her friend and O'Brien. The former shook her head and smiled.

"No, no! The lieutenant would be far from good company if he is jealous—the foolish fellow!" she declared. "Besides, I have already promised to accept Monsieur O'Brien's escort to my door."

"Surely you will not walk through the street at this hour, and with only—er—Señor O'Brien as protector!" cried Bella, and she looked pointedly at the adventurer's empty sleeve.

Now this did not bother O'Brien in the least. He was ready to laugh at it. When people considered him infirm because of his missing arm it tickled him.

But Mademoiselle Joost was, for the moment, seriously vexed with her friend. She rose, intimating that she would go for her wraps at once.

"And let me tell you, Bella, I never felt safer in my life than when monsieur brought me down the ladder. Await me, monsieur!"

O'Brien bowed in his most soldierly way; but he grinned covertly at the disappointed Hondurian girl

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ATTACK.

Now, O'Brien had not led the roving life he had without having had a number of "affairs" with ladies. But they had been merely harmless flirtations, and, although some had brought the adventurer into peril, he enjoyed them for that very reason.

He had never seriously made love to any woman. Nick Carter had chuckled over the idea of the bold filibuster falling seriously in love with Mademoiselle Joost. The detective would have been certainly troubled had he known just then how deeply enamored of the little dancer the Irishman was!

O'Brien waited at the door of the hall. The ball was dying its natural death, although it still lacked an hour of dawn.

The wilder spirits still kept up the fun and frolic; but sober people thought of their beds, and of the next day. The Mardi Gras had continued now for several days and nights, and it was only the people who lived mainly for pleasure that were willing to continue the strain.

As the Irishman waited, he saw, out of the tail of his eye, that he was being closely observed by a group of men who stood near. Oddly enough, they were still masked, although the unmasking had come at supper time.

To certain hilarious natures, however, the masquerade is an outlet for animal spirits that they would be ashamed to display if their features were uncovered.

"Begorra!" muttered the adventurer, "they look like the gang that knifed Cæsar; and Brutus Pizzarri is with 'em! I wonder if they think I'm going to walk

around into some dark alley and let 'em get the best of me?" and he chuckled.

The prospect of a fight was always exhilarating to O'Brien; but he did not want to mix up with the Hondurian and his friends until after he had gotten mademoiselle off his hands.

Nor did the prospect of trouble with Pizzarri, or anybody else, disturb the flow of feeling that had surged over the warm-hearted Irishman's soul. He was deeply in love with Mademoiselle Joost. It didn't matter to him whether he had known her twenty-four hours or twenty-four years! He knew his own mind, at least!

That she had shown him exceeding kindness he understood. But he had been warned that she would flirt, and the Irishman determined to find out, before the carriage reached her apartments, whether she were merely flirting with him, or had felt a deeper emotion in her short intercourse with himself.

By and by she came down the steps, wrapped in a long cloak beneath which only her pretty blue slippers twinkled in and out, the mantle covering her from top to toe, and her mask was on again.

But O'Brien knew her. He felt the thrill of the pressure of her hand upon his sleeve as she tripped down the steps by his side. He paid no further attention to Pizzarri and his friends, who looked on.

They stepped into the carriage, and O'Brien gave the driver the address.

"You do not forget, monsieur?" she said to him, laughing.

"Forget!" cried the enthusiastic Irishman. "I haven't had much else but you on me mind since I first set me two eyes on ye."

"Fie, fie, monsieur! You are beginning to flatter me. I like you best sincere."

"I was never more in earnest, mademoiselle," he declared warmly.

"And it has been such a long time since you first saw me!" she cried.

"For shure, the time has passed like the wind!" declared O'Brien.

"Let us see—how many hours has it been?" she pursued, counting on her pretty bare fingers. "Now it is past four, is it not? You were introduced to me at two o'clock yesterday——"

"Ten minutes to two!" corrected O'Brien eagerly. "I cannot forget the very moment I first spoke to you."

"There you flatter again!"

"Believe me, I do not."

"So it is fourteen hours since you first saw me," and she thrilled a silvery laugh.

"No, no!" declared O'Brien, hoping to make his case the stronger. "It is longer than that."

"Yes?"

"Since I first saw you."

"But you have only been in the city a few days. You have surely not seen me at work in the theatre?"

"I have not had the pleasure," admitted O'Brien.

"And I seldom go out."

"But I saw you the night before," declared the Irishman earnestly.

She looked at him with a sudden puzzled expression dawning on her face. She had removed the mask when they were in the carriage, and he could catch glimpses of her winsome countenance as she turned it toward him and looked full into his own face.

"You saw me the evening before?" she repeated.

"Indeed, yes, mademoiselle."

"But you were not at the ball that night. I surely would have seen you had you been. And having seen you, I would have remembered you, monsieur," she added, in a low voice.

The delicate flattery of this avowal tickled O'Brien mightily. He leaned toward her a little and declared:

"You did not see me. How should you? I was not even one of your attendant courtiers, mademoiselle. I merely stood with the underlings and watched you pass."

"You watched me pass?" she repeated, looking straight at him.

"Yes."

"You mean in the procession?"

"I mean just that. I fell in love with you, then, mademoiselle—believe me!"

She did not seem to pay much attention to this plain avowal at the moment. She still gazed at him, and the emotion which crossed her face O'Brien could not understand.

"You first saw me dancing the *Spirit of Bohemia* night before last in the carnival?" she repeated.

"So I tell you, mademoiselle. And from that moment my heart has been full of you," cried O'Brien earnestly. "Listen to me—do! I found out who you were at once. My friend, Michael, brought me to your reception at my earnest request. I could scarcely wait until I had really spoken to you. And since speaking to you—conversing with you—being in your presence—I am my own man no longer, mademoiselle. Believe me, I have never lost my head over any woman before, mademoiselle——"

She interrupted him with a gay laugh—a laugh that really shocked the earnest Irishman.

"And you have surely not lost your heart, no, monsieur!" she gibed.

"Mademoiselle," he said seriously, almost sternly, "my heart is a possession which I have ever kept untainted. Neither heart nor head of The O'Brien has been deeply moved by any woman before this time. Believe me or not, as you will. I offer you as clane a heart as any man has offered you before—or will offer you in the future.

"What I am—what I have—is yours. I love you. Had I known you all my life I could love you no more surely than I do after these few hours——"

"Since seeing me dancing night before last on the globe, monsieur?" she interrupted, looking up at him sidewise.

The carriage had stopped. O'Brien saw that they were before the door of Mademoiselle Joost's abode. She was nearest the curbing, and he half rose to pass her, step out, and to assist her. But she suddenly laid a deterrent hand upon his arm.

"Wait!" she commanded, and her voice grew deeper. "You say you are in earnest, monsieur?"

"I am! I swear it!'

"That you—you love me?"

"With my whole heart. If you will be my wife I will devote my life to your happiness, mademoiselle."

"And you have loved me since you saw me night before last in the carnival procession?"

"It is true," declared O'Brien, having claimed this point at first, and now, of necessity, sticking to it.

Her laugh broke out again. But it was not so pleasant a laugh as before. Afterward he thought there was bitterness in it.

"You are mistaken, monsieur!" she cried, seemingly choking with the laughter that would burst forth, and her face now hidden from the Irishman.

"I cannot be mistaken. I know my own heart," he declared.

"Fie, fie! You men have no such t'ings," she said, speaking hurriedly in her pretty broken English again. "You do not love me. You haf fall in love wiz a different womans. Ha!"

Like a flash she was out of the carriage and had run up the steps of her house. O'Brien, stunned for a few seconds by her quickness, leaped out and followed her, determined to have an explanation from her lips before she left him.

But she was as rapid as light. She had fitted her latchkey in the lock, opened the door, flashed inside, and the lock snapped in his face even as he stretched forth his hand to seize the knob!

But, as he stood there, transfixed with both amazement and chagrin, he heard a sudden burst of sobbing from behind the door of Mademoiselle Joost's abode.

When O'Brien came down the steps slowly, the driver of the carriage was laughing at him.

"I tell you, boss, some of these little soubrettes are mighty quick. She didn't touch you, did she?"

That driver will never know how near he came to drawing his final breath on this earth, then and there!

O'Brien looked at him silent for a minute or more, while he was gaining control of himself. When he spoke there was evidently that in his voice that awoke some fear in the skin of the coarse driver.

"What do I owe you?"

The driver stated the sum promptly. He did not ask O'Brien to go farther with him. The Irishman paid, and the carriage drove away.

But O'Brien had no intention of remaining here. Something had changed his standing with Mademoiselle Joost. He could not understand it. She had hurt him cruelly, too. And the mystery of the dancer of the Follies seemed deeper than ever.

He strode away, when the carriage had departed, paying little heed to the direction he followed. His mind was not upon the leading of his feet. They went where they pleased.

What was it that had changed mademoiselle, and so suddenly? O'Brien had quite forgotten the business that had first prompted him to get acquainted with the lady who danced the *Spirit of Bohemia*. The troubles of Cecile Dubois were nothing to him in his present mood.

Old as he was, and experienced as he was, the filibuster was as sore-hearted as a boy! He had really fallen in love with the little dancer. His friend, Michael, had assured him she was as good as she was beautiful. And O'Brien's own consciousness had convinced him, while in her presence, that he was in the society of a modest and good girl!

That she had deliberately tolled him on to a protestation of his love, for the pleasure of dismissing him, he did not believe! And then, her own emotion—the sobs he had heard behind her door——

"Blessed if I can understand it at all, at all!" groaned O'Brien, as he strode on through the mean and badly lighted streets, whither he knew not.

Suddenly he became aware of a presence behind him. It was no sound that reached his ear to warn him; but a feeling of peril made him turn.

He was only just in season to defend himself from the stroke of a powerful arm, wielding a blackjack, or a club of some kind. In an instant he would have been hit on the back of the head, and the blow, likely gauged to a nicety, would have brought him senseless to the earth!

O'Brien uttered no cry. He was never a fellow who called for help. He had fought his way alone through many a scrimmage, and he neither shouted nor ran in this emergency.

He dodged the blow, but his single fist, clinched to the hardness of an iron billet, shot out and lodged with terrific force against the neck of the thug who had attacked him.

The scoundrel went down, rolling into the gutter. The man with him sprang forward with a cry. O'Brien heard rapid feet behind him and knew that he was surrounded by enemies.

He did not await for attack from either front or rear. Instead, he leaped forward a second time and struck the nearest man. The blow did not knock the fellow down, but it opened the way for O'Brien to get clear of the gang, for a moment, at least.

He sprang across the street to a doorway that indented the face of a house whose windows were shuttered. Not a ray of light came from the residence, nor did O'Brien batter upon the door for help.

He turned to face his assailants. In the dim light of the street lamp on the corner he counted four beside the two who had already been struck. One—he in the gutter—was already out of the game. O'Brien faced five men, and he had no means yet of knowing who they were, or how well they were armed.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIGHT IN THE DOORWAY.

O'Brien's fancy costume was covered with a long, black cloak, such as used to be worn by gentlemen over evening dress in the sixties and seventies.

The fool's costume, of course, had no pocket in which he could have carried a gun; but the filibuster had lived too long, and had been in too many narrow corners, to go unarmed on such an expedition as this he had entered into this evening.

He had been well-warned by his meeting with Lieutenant Pizzarri that previous afternoon at mademoiselle's reception. When he had left his hotel room to join the carnival procession of the Society of Bohemians, he had attached to the lining of his flapping cloak a hook to which was hung a scabbard holding one of his tried seven-shooters.

O'Brien was an adept with a pistol. But while he was rummaging under his cloak to get the gun loose and in his hand, the band of thugs that had attacked him might have run in and completely "done him up."

It was dark in the doorway of the building where O'Brien had taken shelter, however. His prompt fistic attack upon the first two men who had assaulted him held the others back for a few moments. They were evidently afraid to shoot for fear of drawing the attention of the authorities—although at this hour of a Mardi Gras night New Orleans must be, of necessity, rather badly policed!

Their hesitancy in attacking the Irishman gave him the chance he needed. He was surely a target for their guns if they *did* begin shooting; but O'Brien got his own weapon in his hand and immediately the odds against him seemed (to his mind) greatly reduced!

But he hesitated to use his gun if the enemy did not first fire. It was well enough to have it in his hand; but how could he shoot into that bunch of uncertain figures now gathered on the opposite side of the narrow street?

"It would be murder," thought O'Brien, and he coolly waited for the first shot from the thugs!

He could not recognize Pizzarri among them. He may have been there, but the light was too uncertain for O'Brien to discover a friend, let alone an enemy.

But he wondered mightily during those next few moments what the crowd would do first. Suddenly he found out.

With a wild whoop that awoke the echoes of the narrow street, the five men started toward him, dancing back and forth, evidently with the intention not only of appearing to be merely drunken revelers, but to disconcert his aim if he chanced to be armed with a revolver.

The noise they created showed that they were desirious of making the neighborhood believe that whatever chanced to occur within the next few minutes, it would be nothing but the result of a drunken gambol.

They came on swiftly, however, and O'Brien saw that they were all armed with clubs or canes. Had he possessed a like weapon himself the Irishman would never had fired his pistol. A shillalah in his hand would have delighted the adventurer, and he would have gone in for a breaking of heads with twice the number of those before him.

But bare fists would be no match for clubs, and he did not propose to let the gang get to close quarters. He raised his pistol and fired twice in succession—but over their heads.

There was a prompt falling back from the doorway—so prompt, indeed, that two of the party sprawled in the street, tumbling over their own feet in their haste and fear!

"It's a courageous lot of dogs they are," thought O'Brien, with disdain. "But they've surely got more than clubs in their hands."

He had five shots more in his revolver. If the thugs had knives and clubs only, O'Brien felt confident that he could keep them off—as well as do some execution among them.

But the mere fact that they did not run—that they only retired to the opposite side of the way—secured the Irishman in his belief that they had more deadly weapons than either clubs or knives.

There was a low-voiced conference again of the group. They waited—evidently to see if the shots from O'Brien's pistol would bring any rescue, or arouse the police.

The street had become silent again. Not even in the house in the doorway of which the filibuster had taken his stand was there any sound, or any light. The neighborhood had paid no attention to the shots.

And this told against O'Brien. He saw it when it was too late. He wished now that he could have frightened them away without resorting to shooting. It was the one thing that the thugs had feared.

As nobody came in response to O'Brien's pistol shots, why should there be any investigation if a volley of similar shots were fired? That was evidently the consensus of opinion of the gang, for suddenly they separated and spread in a fan-shaped figure along the street, still facing O'Brien's refuge.

The latter knew instantly what this change of attitude meant. They were about to open fire themselves, and they did not wish to give him any better target in reply than was absolutely necessary.

Even then it really lay in the power of the Irishman to wound, or to kill, each and every one of the thugs. There were five (he lying senseless in the gutter did not count), and O'Brien had as many shots in his gun. And his aim could be deadly, even in this dimly lighted street.

He hesitated, however. And in this hesitation his first chance was lost!

"Now!" cried [illegible], hoarse with passion.

O'Brien understood. Like a shot—before the flash of a weapon in the half circle before him—he dropped to the step on which he had stood, crowded back into the shadow.

The bullets spattered the brickwork about him. But every man had tried to aim at a deadly part, and, of course, the balls had flown too high. O'Brien began to shoot while still lying on the step.

His first shot sent a man staggering against the house on the opposite side of the street. There he slid to the earth, and between the explosions his dreadful coughing could be heard. O'Brien had punctured him through the lungs.

The Irishman had got to his knees.

"Ping!" The heavy impact of his second bullet in flesh was plainly audible, and another man spun around by the force of the blow, dropped his weapon, and clung to his shoulder with a loud cry.

But then the Irishman leaped to the other side of the doorway—which was wide and really in deep shadow. The flashes of his weapon had revealed him momentarily to his foes. They flooded the night with fire again, and the rattle of their lighter weapons should have aroused half the parish!

But all had fired at the flashes of O'Brien's weapon. It was an old trick he had played on them, but they had fallen for it.

Before they could realize that he had escaped their second volley of three guns he fired again. This time he had aimed with deadly earnestness. These men had tried—were trying—to murder him. He was being shot at like a rat in a corner and was offered no chance for his life.

The hot rage blinded O'Brien to all else but the fact that it was his life against theirs. And he wanted revenge!

His single shot, out of the darkness of the doorway, reached its billet this time in the head of the nearest man in the street. The fellow uttered a scream, threw up his arms, and fell limply, dead before he touched the ground.

But he had at least one desperate foe before him. One of the remaining unwounded men started on a run down the street. He had got enough. The other stood his ground and deliberately emptied his pistol into the dark doorway!

He did not aim at one spot. He did not fire too rapidly. He swept the place as though it were a gatling gun he were manning. The four balls hunted O'Brien out as though they were empowered with search warrants for his apprehension.

And the last one got him!

CHAPTER X.

THE COURSE NICK TOOK.

After his surprising, but brief, interview with Cecile Dubois, and his first introduction to the negress who had become the girl's waiting maid in so strange a manner, Nick Carter walked the streets in a most perturbed frame of mind.

He cared nothing for the Mardi Gras now: his mind was too troubled. So he moved slowly toward his hotel.

And as he went he tried to fathom the change that had come over Cecile, and to understand the mystery that enveloped her present actions.

He remembered that on the last occasion when he had met the girl—the night her old friend and guardian, Alvarez, had been murdered—he had seemed to him to be a most secretive and peculiar young woman.

But when he knew her better, and understood what the past seven or eight years of her life with the exiled dictator of Honduras had been, he understood the reason for Cecile's personal peculiarities.

They had lived in continual fear of attack by D'Conyer's friends. It was the existence of the great treasure Alvarez had hidden, which really meant many millions of dollars, and the fact the conspirators did not know where that treasure was, that had kept Alvarez alive in New York City. At any time D'Conyer might have struck!

Finally the blow had fallen. Alvarez was put to death. And why? Had the circumstances changed?—only in the fact that the ex-dictator had made definite plans for the handling of his treasure after he himself was dead. It was all to be placed by his lawyers in Cecile's care, with private directions as to how the money was to be used.

The moment the old man made this will, he signed his own death-warrant. And perhaps he knew it, was at the time!

D'Conyer saw that as soon as Alvarez was gone some move would be made to obtain and to account for the great treasure he had hidden. Alvarez was ordered killed that this move on the part of his executors might be made.

Fortunately, Nick Carter had come into the game just before Alvarez breathed his last. The old man, who had some knowledge of the detective and his work, intrusted Nick with the clue which finally led to the finding of the fortune.

But as long as the fortune was intact, and especially in Cecile's possession, D'Conyer, the present president of Honduras, would not be likely to give up hope of getting possession of it.

And this hope might breed more murders—or any other crime. D'Conyer's secret service, Nick had found, was a thing not to be sneezed at. There had been influences at work in La Guayra in favor of the president of Honduras, although he, and Honduras, were generally hated in that port.

Now the detective was assured that D'Conyer's "long arm" had reached to New Orleans.

As he had told O'Brien, he wanted to learn who was the active head of the conspiracy against Cecile in New Orleans.

And this was the point that he must look to again, as he trod the crowded pavements between the Matchez house and his hotel.

He did not believe that this was the able and cowardly cunning mind belonging to Lieutenant Ulsarri.

The man was too young—too unformed in mind, and lacking in self-control.

Reiffe, immured in the federal jail, was out of the question. What manner of woman was this sister of Pizzarri whom O'Brien had heard little Mademoiselle Joost mention?

And the Joost herself; a dancer in the theatre; possibly a good and virtuous young woman, and not at all likely to be the brains of a conspiracy. Nick put her candidacy aside. With O'Brien, he believed she had been merely used by the Hondurians to bring about the shock to Cecile's nerves that had left her in her present lamentable state.

Who else was in the band of conspirators that was making Cecile Dubois' existence one of misery? Nick was vexed with the girl, but he pitied her, too.

He realized that all that had gone before in her life had prepared her nature to be susceptible to such a shock as that which had affected her the evening previous.

"By Jove!" muttered the detective, "the sight of that woman made up to look like Lucile Moritz, and dancing the very figure that she had danced years before, was enough to shock anybody. I was startled myself."

His mind turned at this to the evidence he had obtained of Lucile Moritz's death. After being deserted, or, rather, deserting, the man Dubois, who had committed bigamy to marry her, Cecile's mother had met and married General D'Conyer, then himself an exile from his native land, in New Orleans.

D'Conyer had planned an insurrection against Manuel Alvarez. In time that insurrection became successful.

Meanwhile D'Conyer took his bride and her daughter, Cecile, then a little child, to Honduria, and they were encamped in a wild part of the mountains. D'Conyer's cruelty had well-nigh broken Lucile's heart before she had been fatally bitten by an asp.

The fact that had broken the proud woman's heart and spirit was to find that the man she had married was worse, if anything, than Dubois himself. D'Conyer had a companion in the mountains who influenced himself in all things. This person was a negress, or Indian woman, who evidently hated, and was jealous of, the general's new wife.

From the tale Cecile had told him of her mother's awful death, Nick believed that this negress had deliberately brought about the end of the woman she hated. She had set milk aside for the child, and one of the deadly adders of the country had been attached to the dish in which the milk was contained. When Lucile raised the vessel to give her daughter a drink, she was bitten by the asp.

"Miranda—Miranda. That was the name of the black woman who had such influence with D'Conyer," muttered Nick. "I wonder——"

He shook his head, going on his way muttering, and finally came to his hotel. He sought out Doctor Monteith first of all.

He had not seen this unfortunate victim of Cecile Dubois' strange "tantrum" since early morning. He found the New York physician very pale and haggard, but hastily packing his traps preparatory to going away.

Nick was calm. He knew that he had a fight on his hands. If Monteith had not been a doggedly persistent fellow he never would have followed Cecile south as he had; nor would he have been able to save her at sea without just these obstinate traits that the detective foresaw he must now combat.

"Ah, doc," he began rather jovially, dropping into a chair that Monteith indicated with a grunt, "I honestly believe that you have guessed my plan already and are preparing to carry it out."

Monteith looked up at Nick—and it wasn't a pleasant look.

"I don't understand you," he said.

"You are making preparations to leave New Orleans?"

"And if I am?"

The question was asked ungraciously, but Nick did not take umbrage.

"Then it coincides with my idea."

"That I'd better throw up the whole thing and go back to dosing patients, heh?" growled the younger man.

"Why—er—not exactly that."

"Now, Carter, I have allowed myself to be governed by you ever since you whispered your name in my ear down in the stokehold of the *A. B. Fenelon*, and I saw you recognized me," declared Monteith.

"Yes. You have been pretty amenable to discipline, old chap," chuckled Nick.

"I kept away from Cecile—from Miss Dubois—until we had recovered the whole of the fortune Alvarez left her. I wish we hadn't found the rotten money! Hang it, man! Don't you see it is what stands in the way of our happiness?"

"You don't mean to tell me," questioned Nick, "that you believe Miss Cecile has grown suddenly purse-proud?"

The doctor snorted his disgust.

"That she has turned you down because she is so rich?"

"Why talk nonsensically, Carter?" demanded the doctor. "Of course not!"

"Well?"

"The fact remains, nevertheless."

"You mean——?"

"That the fortune we recovered for her stands in the way of our happiness."

"Elucidate."

"Say! that girl actually loves me," declared the physician, with conviction.

"Then, why do you give up hope?"

"Because there is something stronger in Cecile's life than love."

"Humph!"

"A stronger influence. I mean it, Carter."

"Explain, please?"

The detective smoked calmly, and Monteith walked the floor while he talked.

"Before old Alvarez died I loved her," said he.

"So I understood."

"The very night he was fatally bitten I had tried to get her to agree to marry me."

"Yes. She told me of it."

"She loved me then!" declared Monteith, with emphasis.

"I half fancy you are right, old man," agreed Nick reflectively.

"But she refused to marry me. And why?"

"Her duty to Alvarez."

"Her duty—as she calls it—to a chimera!" cried Monteith.

"You mean the Great Cause?"

"Bah! You do not say that with seriousness, Carter. I know these Hondurians. I know them better than you think for—than she thinks for."

Nick showed his sudden interest by sitting forward and questioning the young man:

"Just explain yourself on that point before you go any farther, Monteith," he said.

The doctor flushed and hung his head. He was evidently sorry that the expression had slipped from his lips.

"Well—I don't know——"

"Oh, yes you do! Out with it!" commanded Nick. "You meant something. I want to know what."

"Well, it's something I have never told you. You—you don't know anything about my early life, or my folks?"

"Right! I left that to Chickering to look up! But it was unimportant, and I did not ask for a report before leaving New York."

The doctor smiled rather wearily. "So I was really an object of your suspicion, Mr. Carter?"

"Once," admitted Nick frankly.

"You would have been quite confident that I was marked for trouble in the Alvarez murder had you known that I spent the first ten years of my life in Honduria."

"What?"

Nick Carter was actually astonished. It was a point that had really escaped his knowledge altogether.

"Yes. It is true."

"You are not a Spaniard?"

"No. My father was British consul at Santa Luca."

"I declare!"

"He died, and my mother married a merchant—an American—named Monteith. His brother is an immensely wealthy coffee grower in Honduria to-day and a personal friend of D'Conyer. And I shall be his heir."

Nick burst into a laugh. In a moment he said:

"Lucky for you, my boy, that these facts did not come to my attention in the beginning of the Alvarez murder case. They certainly would have read against you."

"Well, to get back to my first statement," said the doctor bitterly. "I have allowed you to govern my course for some time. It is true you brought me into briefly happy relations with Cecile. But that is all over now."

"Yes?" returned Nick calmly.

"I am going back to New York," declared Monteith, with vigor. "And nothing you or anybody else can say shall stop me."

"Quite right," admitted Nick unruffled.

This evidently surprised and puzzled the physician. He stared at Nick in silence for a moment. Then Nick sprang his mine:

"You are going back to New York. You do well to pack your things in time, for you will go by an early train to-morrow. But you will not go alone."

"Eh?" mumbled Dr. Monteith.

"We shall all go with you, I think. And you will go as a married man!" declared the detective.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SCHEME UNDER WAY.

Dr. Monteith was too startled and wonder-stricken at first to reply. Nick continued, with sharp, vigorous sentences, to drive his idea home:

"I know what is in your mind, doc. You intended to throw up the sponge—to run away from a pretty girl. By Jove! I'm ashamed of you! You're not going to run away. You are going back to New York, nevertheless—but as a happy bridegroom.

"You think that Cecile Dubois is so wrapped up in her idea of following Manuel Alvarez's idea, that she will wreck her own life and yours, too. But she shan't! I won't allow it.

"I entered into this game to put that great fortune of hers in her hands—and safely. I see very well that she will not be safe, or the money, either, unless she has somebody to help her guard the millions. You are the man, doc. You are it! You are elected!

"I am going to make Cecile Dubois Cecile Monteith, and then we will snap our fingers in the face of the foe. Your marriage with her will give you a certain right in her fortune—I'll see to that——"

"I don't want her money!" howled Monteith, finally breaking in.

"Of course, you don't."

"Then what are you talking about?"

"But you don't want her to lose what rightfully belongs to her?"

"No," admitted Monteith.

"Very well, then. We will make you guide to her. There will be no lawyers' arrangements or trusts formed, or anything like that. You will just marry her, and by so doing, you will have a perfect right in her fortune that she can give away willingly and voluntarily on your part."

"Confound it, Carter! people will say I married her for her money."

"What do you care?" demanded Nick, smiling.

"But it will look so."

"What do you care?"

"It is a shameful thing for an American to do—to marry a woman for her fortune."

"Granted. But you'd stand even that sort of talk in order to save her peace of mind—and perhaps her life, Monteith?"

"Indeed, I would!"

"I tell you a hasty marriage is necessary to break this spell that has laid hold of Cecile. She is more than a foolish girl. She is a girl in danger."

"What danger?" demanded the doctor, leaping up.

"She may, in time, unless protected by you—as her husband—be in personal peril. She is not now," said Nick decidedly. "But listen to me! I want you to agree to follow my commands closely. You say that by being advised by me you possessed a short spell of happiness. You mean that it was because of my wisdom that you finally gained her consent to admit her love for you?"

"Yes."

"All right. Now agree to do as I tell you again, and I promise you lifelong happiness."

"Carter! If I could only believe you," gasped the young physician, wringing his hands and pacing the floor again.

"Better try," advised Nick quietly.

"How do you mean, to get us married so quickly?" demanded Monteith, suddenly stopping before the detective.

"That's the way to talk!" cried Nick. "I'll tell you: I will arrange about the license. You find a priest who will do the trick, have your credentials with you, and there can be no possible ban against the union. Tell your story to some clergyman and he will put no obstacle in your way, I swear."

"But Cecile——"

"I'll make Miss Cecile see her way to marrying you before ten o'clock to-morrow morning!" declared Nick, with emphasis. "She is surrounded by dangers that she does not suspect—no, no! not physical dangers. But, nevertheless, she is in peril! I agree to make her see all this. I agree to make her admit she loves you. I agree to make her marry you before that hour. Do you have the clergyman ready."

Monteith, who had been absorbing all this, and getting his pluck back, suddenly seized Nick's hand and shook it with all his might.

"I believe you! I'll do as you say!" he cried. "I'll go now and find the priest. I trust everything to you, Carter!"

"You'd better," said Nick, under his breath, and grimly, as the young man rushed from the room. "And, by Jove! I wonder if I haven't got to have a good deal of faith in my own powers, too?

"One thing sure," added Nick, as he prepared to take to the street again, "what this chap has told me about his connection with Hondurian affairs makes me half believe that old Alvarez possessed some power of second sight—I declare it does!

"He is the heir of one of the biggest men in Honduria to-day. Something may yet call Monteith to that country. It may be, after all, that Cecile Dubois' husband that is to be will, in time, bring about the peaceful revolution in Honduria that Alvarez hoped for. And the dictator's treasure may help him in that work. Humph! Well, the first thing is to get him properly married to the girl," concluded the detective as he stepped out of the hotel.

Nick had already come into contact with people who had the influence necessary to arrange all the details of the sudden marriage that he was determined should take place. The matter of the license was a small affair, the settlement of which was immediately promised him early in the morning.

There were other matters of graver import on the detective's schedule, however. These matters dealt with the discovery of the members of the band of conspirators that Nick had to checkmate in order to consummate the marriage of Cecile Dubois and Doctor Monteith.

He spent the time until midnight setting men to work on certain clues that had come into his possession. Finally the detective was enabled to escape the surveillance under which he felt sure he labored, and appeared in an entirely different character on the carnival-mad streets.

He was able, in his disguise, to risk going to the ball of the Bohemians and not be identified by Pizzarri or any of his friends. He hung about the place, watching the people who went in and came out.

Along toward the end of the ball he saw a lady and gentleman come hurriedly out of the hall. They passed near him, and, as they were both masked and cloaked, he would have suspected nothing had they not been speaking in Spanish.

Now, French was almost entirely spoken by the patrons of the ball; also, the man in passing Nick spoke O'Brien's name angrily. It was enough to set the detective on the trail of the two.

He guessed, and guessed rightly, that they were Pizzarri and his sister. They lodged near by, it seemed, for Nick had not to follow them far. When they came to the door the man left the girl hurriedly—and evidently much against her wishes.

"I tell you I will!" he declared, when she would have clung to him. "I am no child. I am a man. I will have revenge on him—the cursed Americano!"

He tore himself away and the girl went weeping into the house. Nick did not follow the young man. He considered it wiser to return to the ball and watch O'Brien. There had evidently been some kind of trouble between the hot-headed and careless Irishman and the Hondurian.

He did not, of course, suspect what really was the trouble between O'Brien and young Pizzarri. It had really not entered into Nick's plans that the Irishman

should fall in love with Mademoiselle Joost. For once the astute Carter had not seen that far!

It was some time before the adventurer came out of the hall. Then Nick did not speak to him and reveal his presence, for just before O'Brien appeared Pizzarri had returned, and with him were several men, all in the costume of the evening, and all masked.

But they were not members of the Society of Bohemians—at least, Nick did not believe so. He thought several of the men looked like sailors and were rough fellows.

Pizzarri had evidently been sent in haste from Honduria to New Orleans to bring information of Cecile, and the fortune, to D'Conyer's representative in this Louisiana city. He may have arrived on a private yacht, and these were men from that vessel, sworn to do his will on O'Brien.

The latter, as we have seen, paid slight attention to the ruffians, or Pizzarri. When his lady appeared he helped her down the steps, and they hastily entered the carriage and were driven away.

This rather put Nick out for the moment. There was no other vehicle to be obtained at that hour, for love nor money. And Pizzarri and his friends disappeared on the run, too.

The latter evidently proposed to meet O'Brien somewhere—probably after he had left the lady. The latter must be Mademoiselle Joost. Nick did not know even where she lived. He found himself in a predicament which he had not foreseen.

But the detective was not in the habit of allowing the grass to spring up under his feet!

Quickly coming to a decision, he rushed up the steps of the hall and past the doorkeeper, in all appearance in great lack of breath and much heat from recent exertions.

Somebody grabbed him, and he panted:

"Mademoiselle Joost!"

"What do you want of her?"

"A very special message. I was sent from the theatre. Her manager——"

Somebody else came up who happened to know that the Joost had already gone—and said so.

"She left with Monsieur O'Brien to escort her, not five minutes ago," was the statement of this individual.

"Where has she gone?" demanded Nick.

"Home, of course."

"And where is that?" begged the supposed messenger.

"Don't you know where mademoiselle lives—and you from the theatre?"

"How should I? I am new there," said Nick. "And the manager was sure she would be at the ball."

Somebody good-naturedly gave him the address of mademoiselle's apartments. The lady and O'Brien had gotten some minutes the start of him, as Nick ran out of the hall. Pizzarri and his friends were not in sight. The detective started on a dead run for the address which had been given him.

He did not know, for sure, that the attack would not be made upon O'Brien before he and the lady separated. That the Hondurians meant the Irishman deadly harm, however, at some stage of the game, the detective felt no doubt!

CHAPTER XII.

NICK AND MADEMOISELLE.

The streets of New Orleans early in the morning during carnival time are not deserted, of course; and Nick was obliged to break through several cordons of hilarious young folk as he tore along toward Mademoiselle Joost's apartments. He did not stop for explanations or for badinage; he pursued his way as rapidly as he could travel—and that was at a greater speed than the lazy horse which was attached to the carriage in which O'Brien and mademoiselle left the ball.

But he did not go as direct as had the driver of the vehicle; Nick was not as familiar with the streets.

It did not take him many minutes to traverse the distance from the ball, however. He met the empty carriage returning, and seeing nothing of O'Brien, and remarking that the driver jogged on complacently, the detective made the mistake of believing that, late as was the hour, his friend had entered Mademoiselle Joost's home.

He hurried on and arrived at the house. It looked dark and deserted; but so did every other house in the row. For a minute Nick hesitated, wondering whether it would not be better to wait O'Brien upon the sidewalk.

There was always the doubt that the man might not have gone in, and that something untoward had already happened to him. Nick never left loose ends in his affairs, nor did he take unnecessary chances. He went the direct way to work to discover the truth.

So Nick hurried up the steps and rang the bell several times before there was any response. Then the quavering voice of a maidservant asked him, through an open window on the floor above, what he wanted.

"I am no midnight reveler," declared Nick, standing out so that the lamplight would shine upon him, he having already removed his disguise and appearing in his proper person.

"What do you want?"

"To see and speak with Mademoiselle Joost. I know that she has just returned from the ball. She cannot have retired. This is most important."

"Who are you?" queried the maid.

Nick felt sure that the mademoiselle herself was right beside the maidservant, and possibly putting the words into her mouth. He did not want O'Brien to know his identity until he could speak to his friend face to face.

So Nick would not tell his name. Instead he elaborated on the story he had told a little before at the

hall where the dance was held. He said he had been sent with a special message by the manager of the theatre, and must see Mademoiselle Joost personally.

The woman saw that he was alone and, after some slight parley, he was admitted. He did not see O'Brien's hat in the reception hall. Mademoiselle Joost stood before him in the cloak she had worn away from the ball, not as yet having had time to change her dress.

"What is your pleasure with me, sir?" she asked him, in French.

Now, while the door was being opened to him, Nick had come to a quick conclusion. If O'Brien was not in the house, he did not wish to compromise him with the lady. And now that he saw the interior of the house itself, and viewed mademoiselle close to, as well, he rather thought that he should not find his friend on the premises.

In the first place, mademoiselle Joost was—or recently had been—in tears. Her eyes were swollen and moist, and her lips trembled as she questioned him. Nick could not understand this; but he made pretty sure that the lady had been alone when he called.

"You are Mademoiselle Joost?" he began.

She really was a most charming-looking girl. O'Brien had not dared enthuse over her much before Nick; but the latter was instantly charmed by the dancer's personality.

"I am she. You have come here with a message from my director?" she asked.

"Not exactly," returned the detective, beating the covert to raise some natural topic of conversation.

"I do not understand a gentleman's visit to my home at this hour," she said severely.

"It does seem strange, perhaps; but my time is limited," Nick replied. "To get to the matter I have in hand, I would like to ask you a question."

"Well?"

"You are the lady who has danced the *Spirit of Bohemia* in the carnival procession each evening?"

"Yes—that is——" She halted a moment in some confusion, but added then: "I was engaged to dance that figure for the entire week."

Nick looked at her sharply. She was not a person given to prevarication or deceit, he could see. She flushed very prettily as he searched her face with a keen glance, and he jumped to the instant conclusion that there was something withheld.

"I beg your pardon—but it is necessary to my inquiry: you have danced the figure each evening—so you say?"

She had recovered her control and looked at him coolly, asking in turn:

"Why do you wish to know?"

"That I will explain when you have replied, mademoiselle," he said, with a smile.

"And if I refuse to reply?" she said, with some haughtiness.

"You have replied already," declared the eager detective, beginning to suspect the truth. "One evening, at least, you did not dance the figure."

"And if I did not?" she returned, evidently piqued by his discovery.

"That was night before last!" suggested Nick.

"And if it was?"

"Now we come to the crucial question, mademoiselle," said Nick seriously and gravely. "If you did not dance the *Spirit of Bohemia* night before last in the carnival procession, who was the lady who took your place?"

"And why should I admit your statement as true—or, if true, why should I tell you what you wish to know?" demanded Mademoiselle Joost curiously.

"Because I believe you would not willingly have done the harm that was done by your giving up your place to another."

"Harm! I do not understand you," she cried.

"I am sure you do not," he said calmly. "You allowed some friend to take your place. It was done for a lark, was it not?"

"Yes."

"Who was the friend?"

"That I shall not tell you until I know your reason for asking."

"It does not so much matter. Will you tell me how the trick was done?"

"Easily enough," and mademoiselle smiled a little. "We are about of a size. My friend is a professional dancer, too. But we look nothing alike, saving in height and figure. We were at the theatre before the time for the procession, and had our costumes with us. She suggested that we puzzle our friends, and she got into my costume, put on a dark wig, and with the mask nobody would have known her from me. Afterward we changed costumes in the dressing room at the ball."

"But she did more than that!" Nick exclaimed eagerly.

Mademoiselle looked at him curiously again.

"You seem to be a very knowing man," she said.

"Your friend used your make-up box before she left the theatre to take your place in the procession."

"Well? And was it a crime to do so?" asked the dancer.

"But she did not try to make her face up to look like you."

The little lady started at that. She bent her brows and looked at Nick with a puzzled little frown.

"Who are you, monsieur?" she demanded. "Your inquiries begin to disturb me. I do not understand their import."

"You will do so anon," said Nick. "Bear with me patiently, I beg. This is not an inquiry prompted by idle curiosity, I assure you. A great wrong is being perpetrated upon an innocent person, and I believe you have been unconsciously used to further the ends of wicked people."

"How can that be? Do you mean that my Bella is wronged?" cried mademoiselle.

"I am making no certain accusation at present. Let us first get at the hub of the whole affair," said Nick enthusiastically. "And we are getting there, I believe. In the first place, you, mademoiselle, are the premiere dancer at the Follies Theatre?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"It is an old theatre. I have been in it years ago myself. You have had many famous predecessors in your line—Madam Carroll, Denay, Louise Charlot, Membry, and Lucile Moritz."

She was watching him keenly, and her own countenance was now under as severe control as his own. She merely bowed an acknowledgment of his statement and the exactness of his catalogue of great dancers who had appeared at the Follies Theatre.

"You occupy, I fancy, the very comfortable dressing room on the stage, which has always been the right of the leading lady of the ballet.?"

"I do."

"The walls of that room are decorated with portraits of your predecessors?" queried Nick.

"You are right, monsieur. You must have visited it before I came here."

"Yes. I was introduced to Lucile Moritz, herself, there. Even then there were several portraits of the famous dancers on the walls. The Follies was old at that time."

"Indeed, monsieur? You interest me."

"Of course, Lucile Moritz's portrait is now with the others?"

"You are right, monsieur. And they tell me it is a very good portrait of that famous and unhappy lady. She was beautiful indeed."

"And indeed unhappy!" exclaimed Nick earnestly. "Through her another is being made unhappy now."

Mademoiselle could not repress a start, and she looked at Nick with wide eyes.

"Expain yourself—do, monsieur!" she exclaimed.

"Your friend whom you allowed to fool the public and take your place in the procession had Lucile Moritz's portrait before her when she made up in your dressing room, mademoiselle. Am I not right?"

"Of course," she admitted.

"And with that portrait to copy, she made herself up strikingly like it, did she not?"

"But where was the harm in that?" demanded the little dancer anxiously.

"Mademoiselle, this friend of yours is Bella Pizzarri, a Hondurian. She, with her brother and other representatives of the present dictator of Honduria, are plotting to injure and rob the daughter of Lucile Moritz!"

"Her daughter?" gasped mademoiselle.

"Yes. She is now in this city, and in my care. Here is my card. I am a New York detective. We have been to Honduria to secure to Miss Cecile Dubois (the name of Lucile's daughter and my client) a fortune that was left her by her guardian, the former president of Honduria, Señor Manuel Alvarez."

He then went on briefly to relate such facts as would give Mademoiselle Joost an understanding of the situation, without going into details which were of a really private nature.

"You will easily see, mademoiselle," concluded Nick, "the state of mind in which Miss Dubois was when we landed here in New Orleans. She had promised to marry Doctor Monteith under strong emotion—gratitude to him as well as love for him.

"But she had that feeling still that she might be breaking her oath to old Señor Alvarez if she allowed anything to come into her life that would be greater than the salvation of Honduria.

"This feeling was wearing off. I verily believe that it would have been forgotten in a short time. She would have married the doctor and in time have looked more sanely upon her duty to Alvarez's memory.

"But these Hondurians know her condition of mind. In some way they have got very close to Cecile. And they could have originated no more refined species of cruelty than this that your friend, Bella, performed.

"Lucile Moritz once danced the *Spirit of Bohemia*. Her daughter saw her at that time and clearly remembers the occasion. Your friend made herself up to look exactly like the dead and gone Lucile; as the procession passed the house where Cecile is staying, Bella Pizzarri turned to her and removed her mask, so that Cecile believed—and believes yet—that she really saw her mother's spirit."

"Oh!" cried the little dancer, deeply moved by the story.

"Cecile believes it was a warning sent her. She believes that she should devote her entire life, with no such interruption as love and marriage, to following out the wishes of old Señor Alvarez. Her mother made her promise, as a child, to never be ungrateful to Alvarez, who was kind to them both.

"Now, mademoiselle, you can see the situation. The Hondurians want nothing better at first than to break off Cecile's intimacy with Dr. Monteith, O'Brien, and myself."

"O'Brien!" gasped the little dancer. "Monsieur O'Brien? He is a friend of yours?"

"By Jove, yes! And I was forgetting him for the moment," said Nick, starting up. "He came home with you from the ball. I followed him to warn him that young Pizzarri and a band of thugs was on his track. What became of O'Brien, Mademoiselle Joost?"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FALL OF "THE O'BRIEN."

The little dancer had arisen, too, and with her hands tightly clasped she looked straight at Nick.

"What do you mean, monsieur?" she murmured. "I—I have nothing to do with Monsieur O'Brien."

"But, my dear lady, he came home with you from the ball. I saw him get into the carriage with you myself. Not only that," said Nick, smiling a little, "but from what he told me I suspect that Old Ironsides is a good deal interested in you, whether you are in him, or not."

Mademoiselle tossed her head. "He only thinks he is," she declared.

Now, Nick suspected instantly how things were. He realized that this little lady possessed infinite charm, and was as seemingly sweet and good as she was pretty. He came to the instant conclusion that O'Brien was really in love with her, but that there was some misunderstanding between them. He felt his way carefully, however.

"Whether you believe it or not, mademoiselle," Nick said, with a smile, "Mr. O'Brien has impressed me with the idea that he is deeply interested in you. This evening, before the carnival procession, he could talk of nobody else. And heretofore O'Brien has never shown particular interest in any lady."

"You would flatter me, Monsieur Carter," declared the dancer, the fire still burning in her cheeks, "did I not know that Mr. O'Brien is interested in quite a different person from myself."

"Nonsense!" declared Nick playfully. "He has never mentioned any other lady to me."

"Perhaps not. But he is—is in love with quite another person from poor me," and she said it so bitterly that Nick knew he was right, and that the dancer was strongly attached to the rollicking Irishman.

"Tut, tut!" the detective said. "I know you are mistaken."

"I am not. He confessed it to me."

"Who, for pity's sake?" cried Nick.

"He fell in love with Bella Pizzarri when he saw her dancing in my place on the globe the other night," cried the mademoiselle, and her laugh, which was intended to be careless and scornful, actually had a sob in it. Her pretty brown eyes were running over with tears, too.

Nick stepped closer to her, looked searchingly down into her quivering face, and said softly:

"There is another girl who is making sad havoc of her happiness. You are as bad as Cecile Dubois—every whit! If O'Brien has told you that he loves you, I know the fellow well enough to assure you that he means it! He is not a man to play fast and loose with any woman."

"He—he told me he fell in love with me when he saw me dancing night before last in the procession. And—I—was—n't—there at all!" sobbed Mademoiselle Joost.

For a moment Nick was puzzled how to take the statement. Then he wanted to laugh, for he saw through it.

"Oh, ho!" he cried. "Tell me just what O'Brien said, my dear."

"No!"

"Yes. I insist. Come! Repeat to me what O'Brien said. Not—of course—all he said," added the detective slyly; "but repeat what he said about first seeing you in the carnival procession."

"I—I said to him that he had known me but a short while. I rallied him on his showing so much preference for a lady that he had never met until yesterday afternoon. He swore he had—had liked me the first time he had seen me. And when I asked him how long ago that was, he declared he had seen me, and—and fallen in love with me, when I appeared in the procession of the Bohemians the night before. Now, as I have told you, monsieur," declared Mademoiselle Joost, "I was not in the procession that evening at all. Bella took my place. So—so he fell in love with Bella!"

Nick Carter burst into laughter. "Oh, ho! The wretch! The prevaricator!" he cried. "And he is hoisted by his own petard!"

She looked upon him angrily, and did not speak. Nick returned to the charge when he recovered his gravity in a measure.

"Mademoiselle, perhaps you know that to be in love makes a complete fool of a man. It warps his judgment and really makes him unfitted for the serious affairs of life."

"I do not know——"

"Oh, it is not so with women. Their nature is different. Loving to them is not an incident; it is a career! But I never saw a man yet who was really in love that he did not do some fool thing to show it! Now, O'Brien has certainly lost his judgment in this case. He wanted to make the matter out as strong as possible, and he swore to you he saw you in the carnival procession and fell in love with you at sight. Now, the truth of the matter is, he lied!"

"What, monsieur!"

"He lied. That's all. He stated something that I know to be untrue. He has told you he loved you before he even knew such a person as Mademoiselle Joost existed!"

"Monsieur Carter!" she cried, looking at him wonderingly.

"That is what the big chump has done," said Nick, nodding at her. "He was not out of the hotel that evening and did not see your procession. He was playing poker with some drummers, and I dragged him out of the game when I came back to the hotel after your friend, Bella, had showed herself in disguise to Cecile Dubois.

"We talked the matter over then. O'Brien knew some of the Bohemians. I instructed him to get acquainted with the lady who danced the *Spirit of Bohemia*, and, of course, you were the lady he was introduced to.

"My dear lady," said Nick earnestly, taking her hand, "O'Brien is in love with your very sweet self. Don't believe otherwise. Forgive him for trying to make his case out stronger than it is. But if you feel yourself drawn toward him, give him your confidence, for I swear to you, I never in all my life met a finer fellow, or one better calculated to make a woman like you perfectly happy!"

Mademoiselle Joost had been crying quietly. But she looked up now and gave Nick a dazzling smile.

"You speak very convincingly for your friend, Monsieur Carter. I—I will give him a chance to exonerate himself."

"Good! Now I must find O'Brien. This conversation has delayed me far too long. The poor devil may be in trouble. I believe Pizzarri and his friends have it in for O'Brien. Pizzarri loves you, too, mademoiselle."

She tossed her head. "I cannot help it, monsieur. I have never encouraged him."

"I can well believe that," smiled Nick. "A man would not need much encouragement to fall in love with you."

"You Americans are flatterers!" she cried, blushing again, but smiling, too.

"And now for O'Brien. He left you at the door, of course?"

"Certainly, monsieur," and she drew herself up a little.

"No offence. I saw that he did not depart in the carriage——"

"No. He paid the driver and waited until the carriage had gone before he walked away. I watched him from the window," confessed mademoiselle.

"And which way did he take?"

She told him and Nick started for the door. "That leads to a bad quarter of the town. If those scoundrels really intended to attack him——"

"Oh, monsieur! he really is in danger?"

"O'Brien is the best fighter I ever saw," said Nick encouragingly.

"But he is at a disadvantage——"

"Because he only has one arm? Don't you believe it," returned the detective confidently. "He can do more with one hand than most men can with two!"

"You are going to find him?"

"I certainly shall."

"I will go with you!" she cried, wrapping about her the cloak which had half fallen from her shoulders in her excitement, and covering again her pretty figure and the fetching costume she had worn at the ball.

Nick admired her more than ever for this, and he put no obstacle in her way. He even kept a straight face when the little lady ran into another room and returned with a small twenty-two calibre, gold-mounted pistol, which she concealed under her cloak as they went out upon the street.

Dawn was just breaking. The streets were silent in this neighborhood. Nick had no idea where O'Brien had gone. He might have arrived at his hotel by now; but there was that uncertainty of the Pizzarri crowd.

The detective, holding little Mademoiselle Joost by the hand, hurried into the street O'Brien had taken on leaving the lady's door, and they went several blocks without meeting a soul or hearing any extraordinary sound.

Then suddenly there came the distant rattle of fire-arms! The peal of explosions spurred Nick to a quick run. He feared that the sounds spelled peril for his friend.

"Never mind me!" gasped the dancer. "Run, Monsieur Carter! Save him! Never mind me—I—I can defend myself."

There was a second volley of pistol shots. Nick increased his pace, and left the mademoiselle far behind.

He came to a corner of a street that was very dark. Suddenly the darkness was lighted up by several flashes of fire coming from the muzzle of a gun.

He was at the scene of the attack upon O'Brien.

CHAPTER XIV.

MIRANDA.

O'Brien had wandered about some time before venturing into this dark pocket of a street where he had been attacked by Carlos Pizzarri and his gang. Nick and the little dancer of the Follies had come directly to the spot—perhaps providentially led.

But the adventurer was down before Nick came into the game. The shots the detective saw fired was the final volley of the remaining antagonist of the Irishman.

The four final bullets in the man's pistol swept the dark doorway, and the last one found its billet in O'Brien's breast!

Nick had already whipped out his own gun, and as he ran up the street he emptied it at the two fugitives still in sight and on their feet. But the distance was too great for sure shooting, and the two men disappeared. Two others lay groaning on the sidewalk; a third, shot through the head by O'Brien, was dead in the street.

"Old man, are you hurt?" cried the detective, reaching the spot.

"They got me—the bloody spalpanes. And I believe, after all, that Pizzarri escaped," replied O'Brien faintly.

Nick whipped out his electric hand lamp and turned the light upon his wounded friend. O'Brien lay bleeding upon the stoop. Nick was scarcely a minute in discovering that, although his friend was seriously wounded, he was not in immediate danger. With his handkerchief Nick stanched the flow of blood before the little dancer arrived at the place. He made O'Brien more comfortable with a coat rolled up and placed under his head.

The mademoiselle ran unerringly to the spot, and she fell on her knees beside the wounded Irishman.

"Oh, my dear! my dear!" she cried, in her pretty broken English. "They haf killed you because of me! The wicked, wicked ones!"

O'Brien looked first in amazement from Nick to the bowed head of the little woman. Then he seemed to understand and a beatific smile wreathed his rugged face. He slowly raised his one hand; pushed back the hood of the cloak from mademoiselle's curls, and smoothed the soft hair once, twice.

"I don't mind cashing in after this," he whispered faintly.

* * * * * * *

It is not usual, I believe, for all arrangements to be made for a young lady's marriage, and the time to arrive too, within half an hour of the moment set for the ceremony, without the bride being made aware at all of the wedding!

That was the situation, however, that forenoon when Nick Carter and Doctor Monteith entered the Matthieu mansion in New Orleans. There had been some police arrests earlier in the day, but news of this had not reached Cecile or the people immediately surrounding her.

Nor did Nick Carter believe that the Matthieus were in the conspiracy against the girl's well-being and fortune. They really thought that she was being persecuted by the attentions of Doctor Monteith, and that Nick was aiding the young man against Cecile's wishes and better judgment.

Nick spoke so insistently, however, on this occasion that nobody delayed his visit to Cecile's rooms. And he caused the doctor to accompany him when he entered Miss Dubois' presence.

The black woman, Kate, was with her new mistress. Cecile jumped up when she saw the doctor, and would have retired to her bedchamber had not Nick cried out to her:

"Don't refuse to speak with us, Cecile. If you do, we shall remain here until you are forced to change your mind. You know my obstinacy by this time, my dear."

"Why do you trouble me so, Mr. Carter?" cried the girl. "You were once my friend——"

"And, as I told you yesterday, I am your best friend now. I am not only going to save you from yourself, but I will save you from your enemies."

The negress shot him a sudden keen glance, and tried to steal out of the room.

"Cecile," said Nick sharply, "you kept this maid with you yesterday when I was here. I particularly request that she keep us company to-day."

"Remain, Kate," said the girl wonderingly.

The negress retired to the farther end of the room. She watched the detective anxiously.

Beginning calmly, Nick narrated the events of the few days in which they had delayed in New Orleans. He told Cecile plainly that she labored under not an hallucination, but under the effect of a contemptible trick that had been played upon her by her enemies.

He told how Pizzarri and his sister, and others, had planned to separate Alvarez's heir from her real friends—especially from the man whom they feared she would marry.

"Señor Alvarez himself was not opposed to your

marriage, Cecile," said Nick gravely. "He told me so. He liked Doctor Monteith. But you must surely love him yourself or you would not have encouraged him as you did."

"I do not deny that I love him," returned the trembling girl.

"Then why ruin your own, and his, happiness? For a chimera? Because of this thing that happened the other night which you foolishly considered a warning against your union with the doctor?

"Let me tell you the true inwardness of that mysterious appearance," said Nick. "And believe me, that I have all the proof necessary to substantiate my statements."

He went on to relate the trick that had been played upon Mademoiselle Joost, the dancer of the Follies, by Bella Pizzarri. He told, too, how Pizzarri had shot O'Brien, and that the filibuster was even then lying in the hospital, dangerously wounded, with little mademoiselle insisting upon watching by his bedside.

"Otherwise I would have brought her here to tell the story to you herself. But I do not need her evidence, Cecile, to prove my statement," declared Nick. "I am going to show you the peril you are in from these people by a quite different witness."

Suddenly he turned on the black woman, and, with a commanding gesture, cried:

"Come here!"

For a moment the maid seemed to hesitate. She would have refused to obey had she dared. But Nick Carter seemed to have obtained a certain power over her that she could not resist.

She came slowly across the room. When she started toward them she had looked defiant, and strode at her full height; but under the searching eye of the detective her own soon fell and she seemed to shrink in stature.

"Who are you?" demanded Nick, speaking harshly.

"I'm Kate, sir."

"You are Kate now! That is not your name. I know who you are, however. And I know something that may yet—unless you confess before this young lady—put you in danger of your life!"

Cecile cried out and the negress shrank still more from him. Nick's eyes never left the woman.

"Your name is Miranda!" declared Nick slowly. "You are in the confidence of General D'Conyer. You are, indeed, the arch-conspirator against this young lady's peace of mind. More than that, years ago, I believe you were the means of Miss Dubois losing her unfortunate mother. You are the woman who placed the pan of milk—and the asp—where Lucile Moritz would get them both!"

Cecile sprang away from the woman and found herself in Doctor Monteith's arms. From that shelter she cried:

"That is why she affected me so terribly! I knew—I knew I had seen her before. Oh, take her away from my sight, Mr. Carter. Do, do!"

Nick flung open the door. He believed that further delay would only punish Cecile.

"Go!" he commanded the negress. "And don't let me find you in New Orleans to-night. There is a steamship sailing for the South American coast to-day. Take my advice—go aboard that ship and return to the fiend in human shape who planned to wrest from this young woman her fortune. D'Conyer has failed!"

As the negress slunk out and the door closed, Nick turned to the young couple who remained with him.

"I have tickets for the vestibule train that leaves in two hours. Doctor Monteith has the priest ready. Here is the license making your marriage legal. Will you invite me to be present at the ceremony, Cecile? I bear the congratulations of O'Brien, who would likewise be present if he could, and the kindest love of the dear little woman who has promised to marry him when he recovers—Mademoiselle Joost. What say you, Cecile?"

And the reply she made was so amply satisfactory that Nick Carter, that very day, speeding northward with the bridal pair, could write in his notebook at the bottom of his notes upon this case:

THE END.

If you miss the next number of this weekly you'll regret it. This is to assume that you like a detective story that takes hold of you in the first paragraph and never loosens its grip till the end. And who does not like such a story? The next number is 677, and the title of this puzzling, interesting, bright narrative is "The Green Patch; or, Nick Carter's Ray in the Dark." It has to do with a Central Park mystery, which sends the Central Office police up a tree. There they remain, while the peerless Nick quietly goes about cracking the nut—one of the hardest that ever fell into his experience. You'd better order the next number, if there is any chance that your newsdealer may fail to have enough copies to go round.

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

NEW YORK, December 11, 1909.

TERMS TO NICK CARTER WEEKLY MAIL SUBSCRIBERS.

(*Postage Free.*)

Single Copies or Back Numbers, 5c. Each.

1 months	65c.	One year	$2.50
3 months	85c.	2 copies one year	4.00
6 months	$1.25	1 copy two years	4.00

How to Send Money—By postoffice or express money order, registered letter, bank check or draft, at our risk. At your own risk if sent in currency, coin, or postage stamps in ordinary letter.

Receipts—Receipt of your remittance is acknowledged by proper change of number on your label. If not correct you have not been properly credited, and should let us know at once.

G. SMITH, C. SMITH, *Proprietors.*

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

THE SCHEMER'S FATE.

Meeting my old friend, Harry Junk, the other day, he related the following yarn:

"From the shadows of the past, the head of my little chum, Tom Squid, bounces up before my mental vision like an India-rubber ball.

"'Ahoy, there, Squid, how do you find things up there aloft? Do you get plenty of pigtail to chew and smoke, and does the Great Captain ever put you on short allowance?'

"He can't answer these questions, of course, but somehow or other, I always find myself asking 'em after a hearty meal, and when I'm sitting by the fire comfortably puffing at my old pipe.

"He's enjoying himself, I hope, up there, where we'll all be, I trust, sooner or later. He deserves to enjoy himself, for a little chum of mine, for there was never a better or jollier shipmate than he, when he was below here, rolling around upon this great ball of a world, which doesn't require either canvas or steam to make it go.

"Some years ago, Squid and I shipped together in a small bark, bound to the West Indies. My chum being, as I have hinted, a jolly, good-natured lad, he soon made himself a favorite with all hands. He was an excellent singer, and on the slightest encouragement always appreciated the music of the ocean. His shipmates would gather around him in a circle, whenever he felt disposed to give them a musical entertainment, and show their approbation by cheering, clapping their hands, and stamping on the deck.

Muttered Threats of Vengeance.

"He always seemed to affect the third mate—an old man-of-war's man, with a face like a mahogany chest and an expression to match. He would order the boys to stop their noise; but the fellows would not heed him, for, you see, as the second had given them permission to make themselves as merry as they chose, they did not consider the second premises of the case worth much. This the boatswain knew very well, and would growl and grumble, but he was paid no heed to. Of course, it would have been upon them, muttering threats of vengeance through his clinched teeth.

"Sometimes when Tom was at work near the quarter-deck I could see the spiteful, wicked eyes of the third officer turned upon my chum with a gleam that made me shudder. It was just such an expression as that seen in the little twinkling orbs of a snake, when they are fixed upon the bird the creature intends to make its prey. I didn't like the looks of it at all; and so one day I drew Tom aside.

"'Look out for that Portuguese, Squid,' said I; 'he's hatching up some infernal plot against you, and so I advise you to be on your guard.'

"'Nonsense,' replied Tom; 'I ain't afraid of his hurting me, seeing as I never did any harm to him.'

"That was always the way with poor Squid. He could never seem to understand that there are some lubbers base enough to hate a man because he is popular and a favorite.

"'Keep your weather eye open, at any rate,' said I. 'I've watched him pretty sharp, and I don't like the way he sometimes squints at you.'

"'The third mate? You don't——'

"'Yes, the third mate. When your back is turned, he looks at you as if he'd like to swallow you.'

"'Why, bless my eyes!' answered Squid, 'it's always struck me that he looks as smiling as a slushed marline spike whenever I catch a glance from him.'

"'Of course, to your face, he looks that way, and so do all villains,' said I.

"'Then you think the third mate is a villain?'

"'Ay, ay! you've hit the nail on the head,' I answered.

"My chum laughed.

"'Come Junk,' said he, 'what's the use of having such a bad opinion of a shipmate? It's an awful unhappy natur' that's always a-suspicioning everybody. I must say that I differ from you about that Portuguese.'

"Grog" Accepted With Thanks.

"'Very well,' I exclaimed; 'you're welcome to your opinion. But, once for all, I'd advise you to be on your guard.'

"He laughed at my solemn manner, and struck me a good-natured blow upon the back. Then he left me in order to relieve the man at the wheel.

"The shadows of evening were settling upon the water, but before it was quite dark I saw the third mate come up from the cabin, holding in one hand a pitcher and in the other a tumbler. Advancing to Tom's side, he poured some of the contents of the pitcher into the glass, and offered it to him.

"My chum accepted it with thanks, and after drinking what it contained, he returned it to the officer, who then descended into the cabin.

"'What was that he gave you?' I inquired, as soon as I could join his side.

"'Ho! ho! don't you wish you'd been on hand to get a taut from the "villain?"' he said, his blue eyes full of merriment. 'It was grog—the best of brandy!'

"'Indeed?' and I began to think I might have mistaken the character of the Portuguese, after all.

"As this thought passed through my mind, I noticed that Tom's eyelids drooped as if their owner felt very sleepy.

"'What's the matter?' I inquired. 'Do you feel drowsy? If so, you may go forward and get a nap. I'll take your "trick" at the wheel.'

"'Oh, no,' he replied; 'I think I can stand it out, though I must own I feel uncommon drowsy. I s'pose it's because I didn't sleep well last night.'

"And he opened his eyes very wide, as if he were obliged to use great exertion to keep awake.

"At the same moment the third mate appeared from the companionway.

"'Tom,' said he, 'go aloft there to the maintop gallant-yard and fix that gasket. It isn't done up as it should be. I'll take the wheel while you are gone.'

"'Ay, ay, sir.'

"'Let me go in your place, Tom,' I exclaimed. 'I can——'

"'No, no,' interrupted the third mate; 'Tom is more active than you are. I want him to do it.'

A Sudden, Dark Suspicion.

"'Surely,' I replied, 'there is no hurry about the matter; and I don't see, for my part, why I won't answer as well as little Tom.'

"My chum, however, had now jumped into the shrouds and was rapidly running aloft. I watched him as he continued his way, and finally saw him step upon the foot rope of the topgallant yard. The next moment, however, he clasped the yard with both arms, and his head drooped to one side.

"'What is the matter there?' exclaimed the mate; but while he spoke, I noticed a malicious gleam in his eyes. 'Why don't you do what I told you?'

"A sudden, dark suspicion rushed into my mind. Pushing the Portuguese aside, I bounded into the rigging, hoping I might reach the yard in time to save my chum. But, alas! I had scarcely gained the top, when a rushing sound broke upon my ear; I heard a crash, and, glancing downward, I beheld the mutilated body of poor Tom upon the deck, lying near that of the third mate!

"The necks of both were broken, the descending body having struck the Portuguese in its descent.

"They were both buried on the following morning; and there was not a dry eye in the ship as the shrouded form of little Tom sank in the dark waters.

"No grief, however, was felt for the loss of our third mate; for we all suspected—and to this day I believe we were right—that he had drugged the liquor he gave to my chum, in order to put an end to his life in the manner described."

A HIDEOUS NEIGHBOR.

In the year 1857 I was mate of the ship *Ellen Bird*, then making her third voyage. It was in the palmy days of the sandal-wood and beeswax trade, and we were at the Island of Timor, anchored at Delhi haven, taking in a cargo.

Sandal wood, so valuable because of its enduring perfume for the manufacture of fancy workboxes, desks, and cabinets, could at that time be obtained in considerable quantities in Timor.

While slowly taking in this part of our cargo, log by log, I, as mate of the vessel, was dispatched on a trip inland, to hasten the collection of beeswax. Three of the seamen accompanied me. Some twenty natives of the island also went with us to take up the wild bees' nests, and these were to be paid in goods at the vessel for all the wax they might gather.

For over a week we slept in two bamboo huts set up on posts, with thatched roofs, at a place the natives called the Dardees, twenty or twenty-five miles back from Delhi.

These bees do not, like the wild bees of America and other countries, build their nests in hollow trees, or clefts in the crags. I was astonished to see hanging to the lower side of some stout branch, far up in the tops of the loftiest trees, a great cone of honeycomb, often four feet in diameter by five feet in length.

These combs are so piled and covered in as to resist the weather completely, and are cemented to the branch with a thick, glutinous stump of very tough and compact wax. I estimated the weight of some of these large combs at three hundred pounds.

During the week we were in the forest, we took, I should think, nearly five hundred of these honey cones. The honey, save what we could eat with our food, was of no use to us, and I have little doubt that thirty or forty thousand pounds of honey were destroyed by us in that one week; for the wax was all that we cared to take.

The first time I saw the natives take a bees' nest, I thought their method of doing it as curious as the nest itself was odd.

This particular nest hung from the limb of a tall, straight, smooth-barked eucalyptus tree, seventy-five feet from the ground. The trunk of the tree was a yard or more in diameter. To cut it down would have been several hours' work, even for an experienced woodsman; while to climb it, after the ordinary fashion, would have been out of the question. This is the way Benu, one of the Timor men, set to work.

In a Cloud of Bees.

First, he took from his bundle a torch of some resinous wood, and lighted it. This torch he attached to his waistcloth, or girdle, by means of a string some ten feet long, so that as he climbed up the slowly burning, but densely smoking, torch would hang beneath him.

To his girdle was also hung a chopping knife, for cutting off the comb from the branch, and a long line, in a coil, for lowering it to the ground. Fola, another of the men, now brought him a strong bush rope, or creeper, some twenty feet long, green and pliable, and freshly cut from a thicket.

Benu first passed one end of this creeper round the trunk of the tree, then, grasping an end of it in each hand, leaning back, and setting his feet against the trunk, he began to walk up the tree, holding fast by the bush rope and throwing it up, by a quick jerk, after every second step. It was wonderful to note the skill with which he took advantage of the least roughness, or scar in the bark, to get a hold for the loop, or his feet. He was not much more than a minute going up sixty feet.

All this time he was almost enveloped in a cloud of smoke from the torch, which seemed to prevent the bees from settling upon his body, which, but for his waistcloth, was entirely bare and exposed to their stings.

Arriving directly beneath the limb to which the comb was suspended, by a dexterous spring, he threw himself partly over it, then drawing up his torch, so that its smoke completely enveloped his body, he rested for some moments before creeping out on the branch to cut off the comb.

Thousands of the bees were flying about him, and thousands more were clinging in black masses to the outside of the comb. But upon Benu's holding out the torch beneath it, they rose in a dense cloud, filling the forest with their deep, solemn hum.

Defended by the smoke, Benu had in a moment or two more made a double noose of his smaller line round the comb; and then, with a few deft cuts of his chopper, he cleaved off the cone from the limb, and lowered it unbroken to the ground. In three minutes more he had walked up, and stood among us, none the worse for his exploit, with the exception of a few stings.

A Safe Bridge Across Gully.

Afterward, I repeatedly saw Fola, and a dozen others of our native squad, climb up for nests in the same way. It was their customary method. Nothing would have induced me to attempt such a feat; nor could any of our sailors be induced or cajoled into attempting it.

A little way out from our huts, on the farther side and just beyond the three dardee trees, there was a rocky gully, or gulch, twenty-five or thirty feet deep, and from forty to fifty feet wide. So steep were its sides, and so tangled with creepers and vines, that to cross it we should have been forced to make a long detour, either below or above, had it not been for a bridge which nature had provided in

the shape of a tree which had fallen across the ravine, spanning it completely from bank to bank.

It had been a very large old tree. The shattered top lay on the side next our huts; and the ends were overrun by a luxuriant wild grapevine, loaded down with clusters of grapes, the outer skins of which were covered with hair! But their flavor was delicious, though on first putting one in your mouth the hair gave you a very peculiar sensation.

Winding through the top of the tree with the vine, there was a beautiful crown lily, displaying its glorious festoons of blossoms side by side with the strange hairy grape-clusters, so that a most irregular and gorgeous effect was produced.

The trunk of the tree, which was at least four feet in diameter, offered a perfectly safe bridge across the gully; and for the first four days we were constantly going back and forth on it. It had evidently been used for this purpose either by men or wild animals, long before our arrival, for the log was worn smooth apparently by the many feet that had passed and repassed on it.

Though still tolerably sound and strong, the log was plainly a hollow one; and out near the middle of it there was a hole in the upper side. I noticed this hole the first time I went across, and thought what an ugly thing it would be to step into it when crossing with a load. It must have been not far from a foot and a half in diameter.

Several times, while walking over this log, I noticed a strange, sickening odor coming from it, which, though faint, was very nauseating; and once, when standing still for a moment, looking down into the gully beneath it, I saw some inches of what appeared to be bones, wadded together. There were a good many of these lying there among the vines and rank grass, and I concluded that a number of animals had died or been killed there, and that the peculiar odor came from these.

Heavy Blows for the Serpent.

The fourth evening we were there, just at sunset, when the natives were coming in from bee-hunting, each with his great sack of mashed comb on his head, I suddenly heard a fearful outcry in the direction of this gully.

"Some of 'em have tumbled off'n that log!" Myers, one of the sailors with me, called out; and we all ran from the huts, where we were eating supper, to see what had caused the dreadful a shriek.

As I came in sight of the log that spanned the ravine, a strange spectacle presented itself. Dangling from the under side of the log, struggling and shrieking, hung one of the natives, named Oati.

At the same instant I perceived the folds of a monstrous mottled snake, rising in great loops above the log, and heard the native who was standing on the farther end of the log screaming:

"U'lar lehai! U'lar lehai!" (Great snake! Great snake!) "Tasahu! Tasahu!" (Help! Help!) "Come forth, white chief, with your fire gun!"

Without waiting to get my gun, for poor Oati's shrieks were awful to hear, I seized a large handspike lying near, and dashing out on the log, delivered two heavy blows upon the serpent's writhing folds, either of which I feel certain would have broken an ox's back.

Feeling these, the monster dropped Oati, whom it had seized by the thigh in its mouth and was holding up by main strength, and rearing its huge, flattened head six or eight feet above the log, looked me full in the face, its great eyes dilated with fury, and its tongue licking the air with a strange hissing sound.

It was a sight to startle the bravest of men. I struck at the head and leaped backward on the log, but lost my footing and fell close to the bank of the gully, and slipping off the trunk, went tearing down through the vines to the bottom.

The fall did not hurt much, but I was snarled up in vines, and it was some moments before I could struggle out, or even clear away the foliage sufficiently to see whether the great snake was after me or not. I could hear a tremendous shouting and noise, however, and soon the reports of several guns.

The moment I got clear of the lianas, I ran through the bushes and grass, down the bed of the gully; and here I came upon Oati, crawling off on his hands and knees. His thigh was bleeding profusely from several deep, ugly-looking holes, and his ankle was out of joint from the fall.

A Thirty-one-foot Python.

There was so savage a battle going on above us that my shouts for assistance were unnoticed. After several efforts I succeeded in throwing Oati's ankle joint back into place; and then, binding up his leg the best I could, I helped him along to a place where it was possible for us to climb out. But altogether this had occupied fifteen or twenty minutes; so that the fight which Myers, Benu, Amme, and the rest were making with the "u'lar lehai" was now for the most part over.

The shots had driven the serpent back into the log; whence, according to Oati, it darted its head out to seize him as he walked across. Myers was now watching for it—firing whenever it thrust its head out from the hole. He said that he had put two balls clean through its body before it had commenced to slide back into its retreat.

Benu now brought an axe, and in the course of an hour the great log was cut off, close to the bank, and fell down with a loud crash—one end of it—into the gully. It split as it fell, and the body of the python was thrown partly out of the hollow; but the crack closing somewhat again, as the end of the log came to rest on the bottom of the gulch, the great reptile was held fast within it.

For a while it writhed and twisted there, emitting a most horrible odor. Seeing it was caught fast, the natives went down and beat it to death with handspikes. They then cut away the log and let its body fall out.

With my pocket rule I measured off a ten-foot pole, and when I say that I placed this pole three times along the dead serpent's body, and had still a foot to spare off its tail, perhaps I shall be accused of telling "a snake story;" nevertheless it's the truth.

At the middle, its body was nearly as thick as a man's; and its scales were as large as clam shells. But the most ferocious feature was its great, bony, flattened head, with its huge gaping jaws and great lidless eyes.

DO YOU WALK STRAIGHT?

Have you ever noticed how very few people walk straight? Watch any person as he or she comes toward you in the street, and you will be surprised to find that they follow a zigzag course. Watch a number of people, and you will find that about nine out of ten bear gradually to the right, then return to their course, and repeat the process until they arrive at their journey's end.

The reason of this tendency to bear to the right is that the right leg and right side of the body are usually stronger, more developed, and weigh more than the left. A left-handed person is apt to lean, and, therefore, walk, a little to the left. If a man be slightly deaf in, say, the left ear, his steps will go slightly in the left direction. In the same way, a person short-sighted in one eye will tend to go out of his true course on the side of the imperfect eye. But quite sound people, with that physical rarity, an equally developed body, zigzag perceptibly.

The body needs guiding; the walker allows his thoughts to stray, and his body follows suit, and has to be pulled up. People in a hurry should learn to walk straight, as all the veering and tacking appreciably increases the distance traveled.

LATEST ISSUES

TIP TOP WEEKLY

The most popular publication for boys. The adventures of Frank and Dick Merriwell can be had only in this weekly. **High art colored covers. Thirty-two pages. Price, 5 cents.**

697—Dick Merriwell's Ranch Friends; or, Sport on the Range.
698—Frank Merriwell at Phantom Lake; or, The Mystery of the Mad Doctor.
699—Frank Merriwell's Hold-back; or, The Boys of Bristol.
700—Frank Merriwell's Lively Lads; or, The Rival Campers.
701—Frank Merriwell as Instructor; or, The Skill of the Wizard.
702—Dick Merriwell's Cayuse; or, The Star of the Big Range.
703—Dick Merriwell's Quirt; or, The Sting of the Lash.
704—Dick Merriwell's Freshman Friend; or, A Question of Manhood.
705—Dick Merriwell's Best Form; or, Master of Himself.
706—Dick Merriwell's Prank; or, The Exposure of Artie Ettinger.
707—Dick Merriwell's Gambol; or, Sport at the County Fair.
708—Dick Merriwell's Gun; or, The Mystery of the Covers.
709—Dick Merriwell at His Best; or, Rounding the Team In Form.
710—Dick Merriwell's Master Mind; or, The Mysterious M Snare.
711—Dick Merriwell's Dander; or, The Day of Reckoning.
712—Dick Merriwell's Hope; or, The Reliance of the Blue

NICK CARTER WEEKLY

The best detective stories on earth. Nick Carter's exploits are read the world over. **High art colored covers. Thirty-two big pages. Price, 5 cents.**

661—The Castor Riddle; or, Nick Carter's Search for a Hidden Fortune.
662—A Tragedy of the Bowery; or, Nick Carter and Ida at Coney Island.
663—Four Scraps of Paper; or, Nick Carter's Coney Island Search.
664—The Secret of the Mine; or, Nick Carter's Coney Island Mystery.
665—The Dead Man in the Car; or, Nick Carter's Hair Line Clue.
666—Nick Carter's Master Struggle; or, The Battle With the Man-monkey.
667—The Airshaft Spectre; or, Nick Carter's Shrewd Surmise.
668—The Broken Latch; or, Nick Carter's Single Clue.
669—Nick Carter's Sudden Peril; or, The Riddle of the Rutgers Street House.
670—The Man With the Missing Thumb; or, Nick Carter's Chance Discovery.
671—Feltman, the "Fence"; or, Nick Carter and the Hester Street Feud.
672—A Night with Nick Carter; or, The Kid-gloved Case.
673—In the Nick of Time; or, Carter Finishes the Feltman A
674—The Dictator's Treasure; or, Nick Carter Nips the duran Plotters.
675—Pieces of Eight; or, Nick Carter Solves a Strange En

DIAMOND DICK WEEKLY

The heroes of the stories published in this weekly are dear to the hearts of 60,000 boys. Diamond Dick is a splendid Western character. **High art colored covers. Thirty-two big pages. Price, 5 cents.**

676—Diamond Dick's Great Round-up; or, The End of the Reign of Terror.
677—Diamond Dick's Buccaneer Boy; or, The Ship of the Burning Sands.
678—Diamond Dick's Encouragement; or, A Runaway Boy at the Haunted Ranch.
679—Diamond Dick's Shadow Dance; or, The Hunting of Grisly White.
680—Diamond Dick in Arizona; or, The Mystery of the Missing President.
681—Diamond Dick's Power; or, The Affair on the Road from Flagstaff.
682—Diamond Dick Solves a Mystery; or, On the Trail of Jo
683—Diamond Dick in the Colorado Cañon; or, Frank's Sigh Another World.
684—Diamond Dick on the Farm; or, The Mission of t Strangers.
685—Diamond Dick and the Dummy Deacon; or, On a Sil Trail.
686—Diamond Dick's Chase; or, On the Track of Charlie.

For sale by all newsdealers, or will be sent to any address on receipt of price. 5 cents per copy, in money or postage stamps, by

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York

IF YOU WANT ANY BACK NUMBERS of our Weeklies and cannot procure them from your newsdealer, they can be obtained from this office direct. Fill out the following Order Blank and send it to us with the price of the Weeklies you want and we will send them to you by return mail. **POSTAGE STAMPS TAKEN THE SAME AS MONEY.**

.....190

STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

Dear Sirs: Enclosed please find.....cents for which send me:

TIP TOP WEEKLY, Nos.....
NICK CARTER WEEKLY, " .....
DIAMOND DICK WEEKLY, " .....
BUFFALO BILL STORIES, Nos.....
BRAVE AND BOLD WEEKLY, " .....

Name.....Street.....City.....State.....

THE FAVORITE LIST
OF FIVE-CENT LIBRARIES

NICK CARTER WEEKLY

We know, boys, that there is no need of introducing to you Nicholas Carter, the greatest sleuth that ever lived. Every number containing the adventures of Nick Carter has a peculiar, but delightful, power of fascination.

MIGHT AND MAIN

These are stories of the adventures of boys who succeeded in climbing the ladder of fame by honest effort. No more interesting tales can be imagined. Each number is at least one-third longer than the ordinary five-cent library.

DIAMOND DICK WEEKLY

The demand for stirring stories of Western adventure is admirably filled by this library. Every up-to-date boy ought to read just how law and order are established and maintained on our Western plains by Diamond Dick, Bertie, and Handsome Harry.

BUFFALO BILL STORIES

Buffalo Bill is the hero of a thousand exciting adventures among the Redskins. These are given to our boys only in the Buffalo Bill Stories. They are bound to interest and please you.

ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY

Ted Strong was appointed deputy marshal by accident, but he resolves to use his authority and rid his ranch of some very tough bullies. He does it in such a slick way that everyone calls him "King of the Wild West" and he certainly deserves his title.

BRAVE AND BOLD

Every boy who prefers variety in his reading matter, ought to be a reader of Brave and Bold. All these were written by authors who are past masters in the art of telling boys' stories. Every tale is complete in itself.

BOWERY BOY LIBRARY

The adventures of a poor waif whose only name is "Bowery Billy." Billy is the true product of the streets of New York. No boy can read the tales of his trials without imbibing some of that resource and courage that makes the character of this homeless boy stand out so prominently.

THE TIP TOP WEEKLY

Boys, Frank Merriwell has opened a school of physical development. He has gathered all of his old-time comrades about him and their adventures are wonderfully interesting. These are certainly the best tales of athletic adventure.